

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
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THE RIVAL SCHOOLS; OR, FIGHTING FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP.

By ALLYN DRAPER.



Phin closed in upon Jack, but the latter, bounding forward, got Phin's head under his arm, and began pummeling away for dear life when someone shouted: "Lay low, boys! Some one's a-coming!" The crowd scattered right and left.

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THE RIVAL SCHOOLS;

OR,

Fighting for the Championship.

By **ALLYN DRAPER.**

CHAPTER I.

THE ACADEMY AND THE FREE HIGH SCHOOL.

John Hathaway and Phineas Funk were the two richest men in Crofton.

John Hathaway had a son, an only child, called Jack, who was the most popular boy, as his father was the most popular man, in all Crofton.

Jack Hathaway had his followers, and Phin Fun had his, the feud between the two waxing hot at times and never completely dying out.

John Hathaway was the president of a prosperous bank in Philadelphia, and was universally beloved and respected.

Phineas Funk was at the head of a large life insurance company in the same city, and was universally detested.

Both men were about equally rich, and each endeavored to surpass the other, the same spirit of emulation extending to their respective sons.

Both built magnificent residences in Crofton, and both spent money freely—Hathaway because he enjoyed doing so, Funk because he was determined not to let his rival outdo him in anything.

Both men owned numerous houses and elegant turnouts, driving to the nearest railroad station every morning and thence taking the train to Philadelphia, returning by the same way in the evening.

Crofton was a small town ten miles from the railroad, but possessing many natural beauties, and being considered an excellent place of residence, though somewhat inaccessible.

It boasted of a considerable population, and quite a number of rich men were among its inhabitants, the greater number being honest mechanics, hard-working farmers, and industrious laborers, however.

Old Funk, as he was irreverently called by the boys of the place, was a great toady, and although very rich, had no ability or breeding, and tried in every way to worm himself into the society of the aristocracy of the place, for it boasted, as do many larger towns.

John Hathaway, on the other hand, was a quiet, unobtrusive

man, and made his way into the best society without seeming to put forth any especial effort, much to the disgust of his neighbor.

Funk felt that he must do something public spirited to obtain the approbation and the patronage of the upper classes, and then secure a position which all his money had not been able to buy.

He would do nothing, however, that would not at the same time line his pockets with money, that being the basis of all his schemes, and so he cudged his brains to think of some plan by which he could obtain the envied position, and at the same time satisfy his greed.

At last he hit upon a scheme which seemed to promise success in both directions.

There was no good school in Crofton, beyond those which taught the ordinary branches, and, as there were many young boys who desired to obtain a more liberal education, the want of an academy or high school was deeply felt.

Phineas Funk's idea, therefore was to start a school.

Not an ordinary or cheap one, by any means, but a high-toned, expensive academy, with high-priced instructors, all the extras which were taught in colleges, and everything else calculated to please the rich of the town, and attract students from elsewhere.

Funk owned a large piece of land just outside of the settled portion of the town, and upon this site he proposed to erect the "Crofton Academy," engaging an architect at once, and breaking ground soon afterward.

He issued a glowing prospectus, enumerating all the advantages offered by the academy, and began to drum around at once for pupils, having already secured the promise of several from gentlemen to whom he mentioned the matter.

The academy soon became a matter of fact, a full force of workmen having been engaged upon it, and before many weeks it was in a sufficient state of completion to give one an idea of what it would be like.

It was a frame building, very large, very showy, and tolerably handsome for a town of the size of Crofton.

The professors, too, were not mere matters of fancy, but actual facts, for they came out to visit the new institution, and were introduced to the rich gentlemen of the town by the

obsequious Funk, who was certain now of stepping at once into his long-desired-for place among the elite.

Early in September the Crofton Academy was opened, and a respectable number of pupils gathered within its walls, much to the delight of its projector.

The rates of tuition were high, and only within the reach of the wealthy, and the snobs who never patronized anything, no matter how good it was, unless it was high priced.

The larger part of the students of Crofton were therefore debarred from the privileges it afforded, but this just suited Funk, who was nothing if he was not high-toned.

He did not want the boys of the middle classes to come to his school, which was strictly a gilt-edged affair, and he knew that none but the very wealthy would send their sons to it.

The want of better educational facilities was therefore only partially supplied, for the sons of the only moderately wealthy and the poorer classes were as badly off as they were before the Crofton Academy was built.

Phin Funk began to sneer at Jack Hathaway, and every time he met him on the street would say:

"Hm! You have to come to my dad's school, don't you? Your father can't get ahead of mine, I tell you. I knew we'd beat you at last, for you're no good."

Jack stood this a few times, and at last he took his books one day and left the school, resolving not to attend there any more.

When his father came home that evening, he said to him suddenly:

"Pop, you must build a school."

"But there is the Academy. Isn't that good enough?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because it shuts out some of the best boys in the town. There's Tom Mayhew, and Harry Sanders, and Charlie Vining, all good fellows, but their fathers are not rich enough to send them to the Academy."

"There must be others."

"Certainly. Why, look at Joe Brown, Dan, Dick and Jim Green, the White boys, Fred Sampson, little fellows, but too poor to go to any but an ordinary school. They are every one of them smarter than Phin Funk."

"I should hope they were."

"Then, who is there that goes to the Academy that any one cares about? Ralph Leclair, Louis Minturn, Ernest Bradwick, Paul Harris, Clarence Fitzroy, and the Lawtons, Spencers and Dalrymples. All snobs, every one of them. Phil and Walter Ambrose are good fellows, and so are Roy Horton and Ben Waters, but that's about all. They would leave if there was another school."

"And you want me to build another school to accommodate them?"

"Not them alone, but a hundred other boys, good fellows, who can't afford the Academy, but want to get an education."

"They ought to have one, certainly."

"I tell you what you do, pop."

"Well, Jack?"

"You've got a piece of land right next to old Funk's?"

"Yes."

"Put up a good, plain, substantial brick schoolhouse on it, and have it free to any one who wants to come."

"Free?"

"Of course. You'll fill it with good fellows right off, and if any bad ones want to come, let 'em, so long as they behave themselves. You can keep discipline in a public school just as well, if not better, than you can in an academy."

"Your idea is a good one, Jack."

"You've got as much money as old Funk has, pop, and if he can put up a school, so can you. A good solid brick building, with accommodations for a couple of hundred fellows will be

a plaguey sight more popular than that ginger-bread thing of his."

"I'll do it, Jack."

"Hurrah for you, pop!" cried Jack, dancing about. "I knew you would. And when it's done we'll have all the decent fellows leaving the Academy."

"I'll see an architect to-morrow and get him to draw up the plans."

"Hold on, pop! Where are you going to get him?"

"In Philadelphia, of course."

"I wouldn't do it. There's Walter Ambrose's father. He's as smart as a whip, if he isn't very rich. Give him the job; he's a good workman, and an honest one."

"So he is, and I like to patronize home talent. I have seen some of his buildings and liked them."

"Then that's settled, and now about the name. What shall we call it when it's done?"

"Suit yourself, Jack."

"Then we won't have any 'academy,' or 'university,' or 'college,' or any high-strung names. We are going to be democratic, and we want a good, sensible title."

"Can't you suggest one?"

"By Jinks, I've got it, pop!" said Jack, after a pause. "Let us call it the 'Crofton Free High School.' There's no nonsense about that name, and it expresses just what the school is intended to be."

"It couldn't be bettered, Jack."

"And we can carry our pupils just as high if not higher than the Academy does. We'll see who does the crowing then. Now, I'll tell you what to do, pop."

"What! Is there anything else?" asked Mr. Hathaway, smiling.

"Just as soon as dinner is over, you take the carriage, with me in it, and drive over to Ambrose's. Walter told me to-day that his father would have to move if he couldn't get more to do, and he was going to town to look for something. That will stop his going."

"We must not lose Ambrose, for he is a good citizen."

"And do you know what else you ought to do?"

"What is it?"

"Engage every carpenter, mason, bricklayer and plumber in town to do the work. Old Funk didn't employ a decent man from Crofton upon the Academy, but got 'em all from Philadelphia, even the hod-carriers. He wants to be high-toned, he does, but he misses it when he looks down on the working classes. There are plenty of poor men in the town a good sight better and smarter than he is."

When the project of building a public school in Crofton was talked of, many prominent and wealthy citizens gave it their approval, and promised to support it with all the influence in their power, the well-to-do and poorer classes hailing the idea with acclamation.

Jack's ideas were carried out to the letter, and for two or three months the plot of land next to the Academy grounds was the scene of great activity.

The High School was opened just after the Christmas holidays with a full corps of competent instructors, and all the appointments necessary to a first-class school, the building, though modest and unpretending in appearance, being most complete in every department, and lacking nothing in the way of comfort or convenience.

Upon the first day that its doors were thrown open over one hundred and fifty pupils were enrolled and assigned to their respective classes, many having come from neighboring villages, and within a week the number had increased, the boys whom Jack had mentioned as being ready to leave the Academy being among the newcomers.

Funk was furious, and sent out circulars all over the State, describing the advantages of the Academy in glowing terms,

while Hathaway said nothing, but let the Free High School speak for itself.

Thus the war between the Rival Schools began, and how it was carried on it will be our task to relate as we proceed.

CHAPTER II.

LIVELY TIMES IN CROFTON.

You may be sure that the feud between Jack Hathaway and the better class of boys on the one hand, and Phin Funk and the snobs, hard cases and incorrigibles upon the other, waxed hot and strong, now that the two schools were in full blast.

Quite a number of out-of-town gentlemen, who had decided to send their sons to the Academy, changed their minds upon visiting the High School and seeing the better advantages it offered, the result being that the latter was crowded to its fullest capacity, while the former, which would not hold as many, was in no way pinched for room.

The influx of pupils from other towns made it profitable for the few boarding houses in the place, and Mr. Hathaway, foreseeing another needed improvement, took the bull by the horns, and built a commodious house for the accommodation of students only, which he promised to have ready in the spring.

Funk, not to be outdone by his rival, resolved to go him one better, as the saying is, and he also started to build a boarding house for students, intending that it should go a little beyond the other one, if possible.

The two schools, as has been intimated, stood side by side, and there was a common playground, the boundary line of the two lots being in dispute, with no fence to separate one part from the other.

The Academy boys had made a boundary by digging a shallow trench midway between the two schoolhouses, and this was accepted by the High School boys, who dealt summarily with such of their rivals as dared to cross it.

They, in turn, were threatened with vengeance dire should they trespass upon the sacred precincts of the Academy playground, and as they did so very often, the struggles between the two factions were of frequent occurrence.

It mattered not if the respective principals were looking on from the windows, for the contests took place just the same, though some excuse had to be invented to calm the minds of the vigilant preceptors, such as saying they were having a common game of football, or something of that sort. When the snow covered the ground the excitement increased to a tremendous extent, reaching to every boy in both schools.

The Academy boys built a fort just over their side of the line, and the High School boys determined to storm and demolish it.

Jack led the storming party, being ably seconded by Walter Ambrose and Tom Mayhew as lieutenants, and with Harry Sanders and Charlie Vining as captain and lieutenant of the reserve forces.

The besieged party had supplied themselves with plenty of ammunition in the shape of snowballs, the rule being that no frozen ones or any stones should be thrown.

Jack's party adhered strictly to this order, the young commander making a general inspection of all the ammunition used by the forces, and Phin was supposed to have done the same upon his side.

When all the preparations had been made, the assault began, Jack leading the attack in person, being supplied with a long staff, from the end of which waved a red silk handkerchief.

In the midst of the first charge Walter Ambrose was hit on the head with a snowball thrown by Funk, which contained a good-sized stone.

Walter received a bad cut, and some of Jack's friends called out that Phin Funk had broken the rules and thrown a stone.

He denied having done so, but more than a dozen boys had seen him do it, and they were loud in their accusations.

"Clear out of here, you mean sneak," said Jack. "This isn't a knock-down fight, but just a little sport."

"You can make it a fight if you're man enough to take it up," sneered Phin. "Our fellows are just aching to give you duffers a good licking."

"You are, are you?"

"Yes," shouted the Academy boys, who were determined to stick up for their leader.

"Do you hear that, boys?" asked Jack. "What do you say?"

"Let's give 'em a chance to lick us, if they think they can do it so easy!" answered Tom.

"Give 'em fits!"

"Knock the nonsense out of 'em! Bully for the High School!"

"Paralyze 'em!"

"Slug 'em!"

"Send 'em home with sore heads."

These and other characteristic remarks were uttered by the High School fellows, and Jack, throwing down his staff, shouted:

"Is it a go, you fellows?"

"You bet!" answered the opposition.

"Then let's sail into 'em, lads!" cried the young leader, and with a rush and a roar the High School lads had cleared the barrier and thrown themselves pell-mell upon their adversaries.

Then began a regular free fight, such as boys like, although instead of every boy pitching upon every one else, big or little, the two parties were distinct, the High School seeking to hold its own against the Academy, and vice versa.

Imagine two hundred boys and more scrambling, tussling, giving and receiving blows, shouting, challenging, chaffing, swaying now this way, now that, the whole surging and swaying about, and you will get a very faint idea of this singular combat.

Bloody noses and black eyes abounded on all sides, though it must be confessed that there were fewer of them on Jack's side than on Phin's, for Jack was surrounded by a score of hard hitters, boys accustomed to work, while the other fellows were idle, indolent, pampered snobs to a great extent, who considered that hard, red hands were marks of vulgarity and bad breeding.

Jack was aching to pay off a number of old scores upon Phin, but he could never get near that hero, the boy keeping himself well in the midst of his crowd.

His associates closed in around him, and Jack saw that he would have to fight the whole gang before he could get a chance at Phin.

He gave black eyes to at least half a dozen fellows, and bled the noses of three or four more, but having made up his mind to have a personal encounter with Phin, and settle the matter of superiority once for all, he called upon his comrades to follow him, and made a more desperate rush than ever upon the struggling mass of combatants.

His chums had not been idle, by any means, and fully a third of the Academy boys had retired, the proceedings having no further interest for them, while not more than a dozen of the High School fellows had left.

"Now for it, boys!" yelled Jack. "Give it to 'em!"

"Go for Phin Funk, every man!"

"Send him home on a shutter!"

"Close up his peepers and put coppers on 'em!"

"Measure him for a hickory jacket!"

"Give him a shove up the golden stairs!"

"Lay him out for a sign in a coffin shop!"

"Make him the chief attraction in a morgue!"

A score of similar remarks were shouted out, and then the two parties clashed together in fierce conflict.

Jack broke through the bodyguard of the cowardly Phin, sending Fitzroy to grass by a persuader under the left ear, and giving Leclair a crack on the nose that increased it to twice its size, and then, having reached his objective point, Phin Funk himself, squared off and took the fellow right in the eye, making him see a regular Fourth of July exhibition in an instant.

Phin closed in upon Jack, but the latter, bounding forward, got Phin's head under his arm, and began pummeling away for dear life, when some one shouted:

"Lay low, boys! Some one's coming!"

The crowd scattered right and left, the two principal combatants becoming separated, and when the newcomer, who proved to be the principal of the Academy, arrived, most of the boys had decamped.

"You were fighting, Funk!" he said severely.

"I know I was," replied Phin, doggedly, knowing that there would be no use in denying it.

"You know it's against the rules?"

"He pitched into me first."

"Who did?"

"Hathaway."

"Oh, well, if it was one of those High School boys, it don't make so much difference. I will overlook the matter this time, particularly as he was the aggressor."

"Those duffers are all the time pitching into us."

"Those what? I don't understand slang."

"Those fellows, then."

"You do well to call them fellows, for they are not gentlemen. I don't approve of fighting, however, and you may bring me three theorems in the third book of Euclid to demonstrate on Monday."

As Brush turned away, Jack, who had been within hearing, said to his particular chums:

"Boys, he said we were no gentlemen. Let's give him a volley out of revenge."

No sooner said than done, and hardly had the man taken three steps when a shower of snowballs whizzed about him. His hat flew ten feet, his spectacles were carried from his nose, his wig went on a chase after his hat, his bald head received a crown of snow that made it look for all the world like the top of Mont Blanc, and his big ears got as red as peonies.

He stooped down to pick up his glasses, being near-sighted, even with them on, when he received four or five snowballs plump upon that portion of his body which came most into use when he sat down.

The sudden shock caused him to lose his balance, and he fell upon his head into a pile of snow.

In an instant all that could be seen of him was his long legs sticking straight up in the air, the boys having suddenly rushed forward and stood him upon his head.

Then they retreated in good order, leaving him to get out as best he might, a feat which he soon accomplished, not very much the worse for his gymnastic feats, but considerably disturbed in temper.

When he had pulled himself together and gazed around him, not a boy was to be seen, some of the Academy fellows taking advantage of his near-sightedness, having embraced the favorable opportunity to pay off old scores upon him, and

of course they didn't want to be caught any more than the High School boys.

"The boys are becoming utterly lawless," grumbled old Brush, "and it's all on account of that young Hathaway. Decidedly he's the worst boy in town, and the High School is a regular nuisance."

CHAPTER III.

THE FIGHT BETWEEN THE CHAMPIONS.

Jack had not heard the last of the assault upon Brush, for Phin Funk, like the sneak he was, informed the principal of our hero's participation in the affair, and a complaint was made early Monday morning.

The barbarous custom of flogging was not in vogue at either of the schools, but Jack had extra duties put upon him, which threatened to take up all his spare time for a week.

If it had been an ordinary frolic, Jack would have got off very lightly, but an attack upon the principal of the Academy was a serious offense, and even Jack's position as the son of the founder of the school could not mitigate his punishment.

Old Funk threatened to sue Jack, and have him bound over to keep the peace, but it soon leaked out that Phin was as deep in the mire as Jack was in the mud, and nothing more was said.

The High School teachers considered it such a good joke on old Brush that they were not nearly so hard on Jack as they pretended to be, and his actual punishment amounted to but little.

He had it in for Phin, as the saying is, however, and watched every opportunity so as to get even with the contemptible fellow.

No chance offered during the winter, and the boys had all they could do to keep up with their lessons and talk about their opposition in other ways.

During the early spring a new wing was added to the High School, and a gymnasium to the Academy, the latter not possessing that convenience in the first place, a matter in which its rival had taken the lead.

New boarding houses had been built, and both schools were full, the additional boys serving to keep up the lively times of the previous winter.

When the weather grew warmer the spats increased between the rival factions, and out of them an incident arose which created no little excitement.

Some of the smaller boys of Jack's crowd were set upon one afternoon by Phin's cronies, and Jack getting wind of it, flew to the rescue.

The Academy boys rallied in full force, however, and a pitched battle was imminent, when Jack stepped forward, held up his hand, and said:

"See here, I propose to settle, once for all, which school is to be the boss of this town. I will fight your champion in a fair, regular, professional fight, in a ring. I challenge Phin Funk to meet me in Patchen's Meadows in two weeks, or as soon as he likes, to settle the thing."

"A prize-fight," said the boys. "Just the thing."

"You know the place," continued Jack. "There is a good, hard, level place there, shut in by hills, where we can pitch a ring and have the mill out in true professional style."

"Take him up, Phin," said Fitzroy, one of Phin's cronies. "You can fight as well as he can."

"You can arrange with my backers, or whatever else you want to call 'em," said Jack. "Tom, will you be one?"

"You bet!" replied Mayhew.

"Pick me out another good one."

"Charlie Vining, if he will."

"Of course he will," said the boy, who was a great friend of Jack's.

"Then that's settled. Do you represent the Academy man, Fitzroy?" asked Mayhew.

"Yes," replied Phin, "he and Leclair."

The fight was then arranged to take place in the Meadows two weeks from the following Saturday at ten in the morning, and all the boys were cautioned to keep dark, as it would not do to let the principals know anything about it.

On the morning of the appointed day Jack was driven to the ground by Tom and Charlie, and soon after their arrival Phin Funk appeared with his trainers and seconds, and the ring was staked off in true regulation style.

The place was some two miles from town, and many of the boys had driven thither, though the larger proportion had walked, scarcely a boy from either school being absent.

They formed a dense throng all around the ropes, and every face showed the most intense interest in the proceedings which were about to take place.

The two contestants were stripped, and appeared in the most excellent form, without an ounce of superfluous flesh upon their bones, and their hard, strong muscles standing out upon their arms and legs in a manner that gave promise of a tough encounter.

There was very little difference in their respective appearances, with the exception that Jack's handsome, manly face presented a remarkable comparison to Phin's dogged and sinister looks.

Jack won the toss, and took up a position with his back to the sun, which gave him a decided advantage, Phin being obliged to face the light, which was very bright and dazzling.

Both men being ready, they advanced and shook hands, and then the battle began.

The first round was occupied mostly in light sparring, Phin being wary, and Jack desiring to become acquainted with his opponent's style before going in heavy.

Phin, fancying that a sudden attack would break down Jack's guard, made a quick, desperate onslaught, but to his intense surprise received a stunner on the nose which caused the blood to gush out most freely.

"First blood for Hathaway!" cried Jack's adherents. "Bully for our side!"

Jack instantly followed up this blow with another on the forehead, and Phin staggered, slipped, and fell heavily to the ground.

Jack's men claimed first knock-down, but Phin's seconds disputed it, claiming that their man had slipped.

This was finally allowed, and the first round was over, having occupied about three minutes and a half.

When the next round was called, Jack came up as fresh as a daisy, and at once adopted Phin's tactics, rushing in with heavy blows, and driving his opponent into his corner.

Phin resisted stoutly, and Jack retreated, the other, thinking that he was dismayed, rushing in suddenly and leaving himself unguarded.

Jack instantly aimed a straight hit at Phin's forehead, but the latter, foreseeing that it would be too much for him, dropped upon the instant, the force of the blow carrying Jack over on top of him.

In the next round, Jack, seeing the wily tactics of his adversary, pretended to take the defensive, and Phin, fancying that he was to have an easy victory, began a vicious and most desperate attack upon his enemy, Jack retreating a few steps.

He suddenly made a feint as if to attack, and Phin put up his guard, when Jack suddenly got in a resounding blow with

his left that was totally unexpected, and knocked Phin clear off his feet.

"Bully for you!" yelled the High School boys. "First knock-down for Hathaway. Go in, Jack! Give him a good one!"

This round had lasted but half a minute, and in the fourth Phin was more wary, having no fancy for Jack's sledge-hammer blows.

He hit Jack one good crack on the jaw, and then attempted to grapple with and throw him, but the wily fellow sent in an uppercut, which took Phin under the ear and nearly stunned him.

Both men clinched, when Jack succeeded in getting his adversary's head under his arm, and holding it with a grip like a vise, rained blow after blow upon Phin's face, closing one eye, and making the blood flow copiously.

Phin, seeing that he was getting the worst of it, finally dropped, and both men fell heavily to the ground.

This round had lasted five minutes, and was the most desperate that had yet taken place, and showed both boys for just what they were worth.

In the fifth round, which was short, Jack threw Phin upon his back at the first tussle, but in the sixth the contest was most bitter.

Phin now got in some lively cracks, and Jack was dazed for the instant, but quickly rallying, he put in a counter which knocked out one of Phin's teeth, and made him decidedly sick.

He did not give in, though, but rushed madly upon Jack, with the intention of throwing him.

Jack quickly dropped to his knees, and then rising, suddenly caught Phin under the chin and fairly lifted him from his feet.

The latter did not fall, although he came very near it, and regaining his balance closed with Jack, when the most desperate encounter of all took place, both boys bleeding profusely, but Jack fighting like a game cock, and showing more wind than his now desperate enemy.

In the midst of it all, just as Jack was about to send in a finishing blow, which would have undoubtedly settled Phin's case for that round, at least, a tumult arose, and some of the boys on the outskirts of the crowd shouted out:

"Cheese it, fellows! Here comes the sheriff over the hill!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHERIFF COMES TOO LATE.

"Make tracks, boys!" cried one of Phin's cronies, as soon as this startling announcement was made, and many of the boys scattered at once.

Mayhew sprang up, and looking toward the hill-top, saw that the scouts had indeed told the truth, and that not only the sheriff, but two or three constables and the principals of both schools were coming on at full tilt.

"Stop where you are!" cried Mayhew. "Pull up the stakes, Fitzroy. Charlie, stamp down the sods. Leclair, get a coat and trousers on your man. Be quick now, all of you, and don't give the thing away."

In a twinkling Jack had drawn a pair of trousers over his tights, put on a shirt, coat and cap, and had his face washed clean, Leclair putting Funk to rights at the same time, while Walter Ambrose stowed away the stakes, ropes, sponges and other paraphernalia of the ring in a snug place under a wagon seat.

By this time the sheriff had arrived, but nothing was left to show what had occurred, and although he looked around

suspiciously, there was nothing which he could use as evidence, not having seen the two boys actually fighting.

"What are you boys doing?" he asked, striding up, and looking very pompous.

"Nothing," said Vining.

"You've been fighting," said Brush, the Academy principal.

"The deuce we have!" said Mayhew saucily. "I'll warrant you didn't see us, even with your glasses."

This allusion to the man's short-sightedness caused a laugh, which the sheriff interrupted by saying:

"I heard that there was going to be a prize-fight."

"Whereabouts?" asked several of the boys. "Let's go and see it."

"I rather fancy you have already seen some of it," replied the officer, catching sight of Phin's face, though his companions tried to hide him.

"Where was it?"

"That fellow's face looks like it, and I reckon he didn't get the best of it."

"Oh, he's only been sunstruck a little," said Jack, with a laugh.

"Yes, and the son was the son of John Hathaway, I fancy," said the sheriff quickly. "I've got a good mind to arrest you both."

"Yes, and get yourself into trouble in the bargain," said Jack sharply. "Did you see us fighting?"

"No."

"Then what are you gassing about? Can't we walk through the meadows if we like?"

"You're trespassing, so get along with you, or I'll run you in as it is. I ain't satisfied yet that there wasn't a fight, but, as you say, I didn't see it, and so I ain't got no authority to——"

"You're off your base!" shouted some of the boys, throwing handfuls of dirt at the pompous little man, who could not tell who the offenders were.

The boys had begun to thin out considerably by this time, and the officer, consulting with his companions, said at length:

"I'm up to snuff, young fellows, and don't you forget it. I won't do nothing now, by the advice of your masters, but if I hear any more of this nonsense, you'll all be jugged."

"Go to bed!"

"Soak your head!"

"Take a walk on your ear!"

The sheriff shook his fist and walked away with the tutors, none but a dozen or so boys being left on the ground by the time he was out of hearing.

"We'll finish this business some other time," said Jack to Phin. "I haven't licked you yet, and I propose to do it, sheriff or no sheriff."

"We are ready whenever you are," said Fitzroy, on behalf of Funk, who only sulked and said nothing.

"Some duffer has given the thing away," remarked Mayhew, "and if we find out who it was we'll make Crofton too hot to hold him."

"You don't think it was one of our fellows, do you?" asked Fitzroy.

"You didn't do it, nor Leclair," answered Jack. "But further than that I would not say."

"Perhaps you think I did," blustered Phin. "I'll let you know I ain't such a chicken."

"I didn't say you were," answered our hero quietly.

"I'll fight you whenever you like, for I ain't a-scared for a cent. I can lick you any day, and I'll show——"

"Talk is cheap," interposed Mayhew. "Come, Jack. The fun's over. Let's get. I'll see you again, Fitz, and we'll arrange this little affair on the quiet."

"I'm ready. We won't have a gang around the next time."

"No, only a dozen of the best fellows on both sides. I'll fix that up all right."

Jack, Tom and Charlie then got into the buggy and drove toward town, talking over the matter on the way.

"Do you really think Funk gave the sheriff the wink to stop the fight?" asked Charlie.

"He's mean enough to do it. It wasn't Fitzroy, anyhow, for he was as anxious as we that the fight should come off."

"We'll find out some day," said Tom, "and when we do some fellow will get an unmerciful wallop."

"And be drummed out of town, besides," added Charlie. "I wouldn't want to be in his shoes."

The boys were all closely questioned concerning the fight, but nothing was elicited; and to calm the suspicions of the principals, a match game of football was arranged to take place between the two schools on the afternoon of the Wednesday following the fight.

The game opened lively, Jack getting a goal the first thing, but in the second inning the Academy fellows were more wary.

Walter got hold of the ball, however, but made an unlucky fall, and Phin and his crowd made a dead set after him, with the intention of taking the ball away from him, but Jack and his particular cronies rallied in force, pulled them away, and gave Walter a chance to get up.

He tossed the ball to Jack, who ran with all speed toward the opposite goal, and made an excellent drop kick just as time was called.

Charlie Vining, not hearing the call, gave the ball a finishing touch, and sent it over the line, and at that minute Jack called out to him that time had been called.

"Is that so?" said Charlie. "I didn't hear it."

"That's too thin," said Phin. "You wanted to cheat. You know you did."

"Don't you dare call me a cheat, or I'll slap your face, Phin Funk!" said Charlie, reddening.

"You are a cheat, and everybody knows it. As for slapping my face, do it if you think best."

Before Jack, who did not care to have any disturbance, could interfere, Charlie had walked boldly up to the braggart and gave him a stinging blow on the cheek with his open hand, the white marks left by his fingers being distinctly visible.

In an instant there was a great hubbub, the Academy boys coming to the rescue of their champion, and surrounding the plucky little fellow who had so bravely punished him with threatening gestures.

The High School fellows rushed to Charlie's assistance at once, and it looked as if there would be a free fight when Jack stepped up, thrust aside the most demonstrative of both parties, and said, in a loud voice:

"Hold on, boys, we don't want to have a fight now. Let's finish the game."

"We ain't going to have one of our fellows slapped in the face for nothing," said Leclair.

"Do you call it nothing to be told you are a cheat?" asked Jack. "Funk dared Vining to slap him, and if Charlie was man enough to take it up and do as he had promised, who's going to blame him for it?"

The game was proceeded with, Phin and two or three of his chums declining to have anything to do with it, however, and Jack's side scored a complete victory.

"Is there anything else you can do better than playing football?" asked Mayhew mischievously.

"You can't beat us in a shell race," said Phin, who stood near.

"I'll bet we can," answered Jack, in an instant. "We have

been wanting to try our new boat, and this will be a good chance to do it."

"We'll give you a chance, then," snapped Phin. "And whoever don't show up on the day of the race will have to give in beaten."

"Of course," replied Jack, not understanding Phin's meaning. "We expect to show up."

"If you don't, you're beaten—understand that?"

"Why, of course; but we'll show up. Who's in your crew?"

"You'll find that out on the day of the race."

"You know who our men are, so what's the matter with you? You don't expect to hire a lot of professionals, do you?"

"We don't need to. There's me and Fitzroy, and Broderick, and Minturn, and the best fellows of our crowd. Harris is coxwain. Make it a week from Saturday, at nine o'clock, on the lake, starting from the boat-houses, straight up the lake two miles, around the stake-boat and back to my dad's launch."

"All right."

Then the boys separated, and Jack, as he walked home with Mayhew and Vining, who were both in his crew, said:

"There's some good men in the other crew. Broderick is as strong as an ox, though he don't know much besides pulling an oar and running."

"Minturn pulls a good stroke too, but he's the biggest fop in town," said Vining. "We're not afraid of them, though, for all that."

"Afraid!" said Jack. "I guess not. The High School boys don't know what it is to be afraid, and if we don't lick those fellows clean out of their boots, my name is not Jack Hathaway!"

CHAPTER V.

PRACTICAL JOKES—A PLOT DISCOVERED.

Besides the occasional friendly contests between the rival schools, like the proposed boat race, which served as a sort of spice to the frequent outbreaks and fistic encounters, the boys were continually playing practical jokes on one another, and here the High School was generally ahead.

On the Saturday night following the day on which the arrangements for the boat race were made, Jack, Tom and Walter Ambrose, the son of the architect, perpetrated a joke which was considered the best of the season, particularly as it was not found out who it was who did it for many years.

The three boys got into the Academy late at night by means of skeleton keys and a broken pane of glass in the cellar window, and Walter, who was considerable of a mechanic, altered the regulator of the clock so as to make it run slow.

In the morning it was fifteen minutes behind time, but as Mr. Brush had often told the Academy boys that they must not regard the other clocks but go strictly by their own, they were all late.

The master's watch was right, and he, thinking this a piece of open insubordination, threatened to give every boy in the school extra tasks to perform.

When told that the clock was wrong, he said that they would have to go by it that day, the consequence being that they did not get out until half an hour after the regular time at noon, the clock having continued to lose all the morning.

The fun of the thing was yet to come, however, for when all the boys were at their dinners the three conspirators stole into the Academy tower and put the clock right, fixing the regulator as it should be.

This cut off another half hour from the Academy nooning,

which was two hours, and many of the fellows, supposing they had lots of time, were late to the afternoon session.

This so enraged Brush that he kept the whole school in until six o'clock, and meantime the High School boys were having a fine time on the playground, Jack and his crew being on the lake engaged in trying their new shell.

Phin suspected that the janitor had put up the job on the boys, some of whom had been annoying him, and the poor man's life was a burden thenceforth, until he finally made a complaint and the persecution ceased.

Both crews practiced considerably during the week, and on the Friday afternoon preceding the day of the race there was a spurt between them, in which the High School crew came out several lengths ahead.

Phin claimed, however, that his men had not been half trying, and pretty soon they put up their boat, while Walter and half a dozen of his companions went in swimming.

In the evening Jack was walking along the street in company with Walter, when Tom Mayhew came up, and first looking around to see that no one was listening, said impressively:

"Boys, we want to keep an eye on our boat to-night, for I fear mischief."

"What do you mean?" asked Jack and Walter in a breath.

"Why, I heard Phin and one or two of his cronies talking together late this afternoon, and they were saying something about our boat, and that if we did not show up, or if we declined to race for any reason, they would be declared the winners."

"But we will show up."

"We can't if anything happens to our boat."

"But how can there? It isn't likely that you or I, or any of us, are going to hurt our own boat, is it? Of course not."

"But some of the Academy fellows are mean enough to do it for us, Jack."

"Nonsense!"

"But they are, I tell you."

"I don't deny that, Tom, but I don't see how they are going to do it when the boat-house is kept locked."

"How many keys are there?"

"Four."

"I have lost mine," said Walter. "I think it must have dropped out of my pocket when I went in swimming this afternoon. I missed it when I reached home, and went back after it, but couldn't find it."

"Were any of the fellows in with you?"

"Only our own set."

"Did you see any of the others when you returned?"

"No."

"Perhaps you lost it somewhere else. There isn't any danger, Tom. You don't suspect Walter, I hope?"

"I'd sooner suspect myself."

"I didn't feel uneasy about it myself," said Walter, "until Tom spoke. I don't believe they'd spoil our boat, because they are all as anxious to win as we are, and they think they can, too."

"Of course they won't," answered Jack reassuringly. "Well, boys, here's my house, so good-night. If you haven't anything better to do, Tom, come and stay with me to-night after you get your lessons."

"All right, I will."

Jack occupied the evening in various ways, and shortly after nine o'clock went outside to look for Tom, when he saw a small boy advancing along the graveled path, keeping well in the shade, as if to prevent his being seen.

"Sh! Is that you, Hathaway?" asked the boy, Jack recognizing the voice as belonging to one of the Academy students.

"Yes; is that you, Cline?"

"Sh! Not so loud," whispered the lad. "Come down here in the shade."

"What do you want?" asked Jack, drawing nearer.

"Don't make any noise," said the lad, drawing Jack into a dense mass of shrubbery just off the path.

"What's all this mystery about, Cline?"

"I'm one of the Academy boys, I know, and us fellows would do anything to hurt one of your crowd, but I want to see fair play myself, and hate to have any underhanded dodges going on."

"Do you suspect us of any?"

"No; but I wanted to warn you to look out for some of our fellows. I don't know who they are, and if I did I couldn't tell you what they're going to do, for I think it's a plaguey mean trick."

"Well, what is it, Cline? Don't be afraid. I won't give you away. You are trembling with fear. There's nobody around. Don't be afraid."

"I hear footsteps. And there is a whistle—your whistle, too."

"It's only Tom; wait a minute."

"Oh, I daren't. He'd lick me. He said he would the next time he caught me."

"Nonsense! He was only joking. A big fellow like Tom wouldn't hurt such a little fellow as you."

"But I'm afraid."

"Well, then, I'll keep him waiting for a few minutes. Speak quick, though, or we will be discovered."

"Some of the fellows are going to saw your boat to-night so that you can't use it to-morrow, and so that they may win the race. Somebody found a key to your boat-house, and they are going in there to-night to cut your shell."

"By Jove, what villains! Is Phin Funk one of them?"

"I don't know, and I wouldn't dare tell if I did. They would lick me like blazes if they found me out. I am afraid now they have followed me, for I saw some of them in the street just now, and they asked me where I was going. I said home, but your house is out of my way, and I'm afraid they have watched me."

"You can wait here until you think there is no one around, and then go home."

"Jack!" called Tom at this moment. "Oh, Jack!"

"I daren't do that!" whispered Cline. "My father locks up the house at half-past nine, and I've got only just time to get home now."

"Oh, Jack!" called Tom again.

"Don't answer him. You won't tell any one what I told you?"

"No. When do you suppose those fellows will try to cut our boat?"

"Not until late, for they don't want to be caught at it. They said about twelve o'clock—that is, I think they'll take that time."

"You do know who they are, well enough, and you ought to tell me."

"No, I dare not; they would lick me. I do know, but I'm afraid to tell. Don't ask me any more."

"Jack, where the deuce are you?" cried Tom, who had been to the door and found that Jack was not within, and was now approaching the very spot where his chum was concealed.

The frightened Academy boy dropped upon the wet grass and squirmed away before Jack could detain him, and then Jack himself jumped out, and catching Tom by the shoulders gave a great shout, and laughed.

"Ho—ho! You're a fine boy to look for a fellow!" he cried, laughing immoderately and pulling Tom towards the house.

"You must be as blind as a bat."

When they reached Jack's room and sat down, Tom in a

big easy-chair and Jack at his feet, the latter suddenly said:

"Tom, I'm mighty glad I asked you to come to-night, though I'm afraid you won't get much sleep."

"Why not? Are you going to keep me awake while you grind away at your Greek roots?"

"No; but we'll have to spend some time in the boat-house."

"Jack Hathaway!" cried Tom, springing out of his seat, and pulling Jack to his feet, while he looked him square in the face, "you've found out something. Are those contemptible fellows going to hurt our boat?"

"They are going to try it," said Jack, and then he related all that he had just heard, without mentioning Cline, however.

"We must stop 'em," said Tom, when Jack had finished, "and give 'em a good licking in the bargain."

"I've got a good plan, Tom. You and I will be enough. They will be badly sold, I tell you."

"But we'd better go down there now."

"No, we won't. Eleven o'clock will be time enough. I'll go and give pop a hint, so that he'll know what keeps me out so late."

Jack and Tom amused themselves in various ways until eleven, putting out their light half an hour or so before this time, and then they left the house and made their way with all possible speed to the boat-house, taking care not to be seen by any chance stragglers.

When they had entered and locked the door behind them, they took their new boat from its resting place near the door, and substituted the old one for it, putting the new boat where the old one had been.

"Now we are ready," said Jack, "and they may come as soon as they like."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOAT RACE.

Jack and Tom had waited about fifteen minutes when they heard the sound of a key turning in the lock, and the door was opened softly, three shadowy forms entering with great caution.

"It's the nearest one," whispered a voice.

"All right; give me the saw, and keep a sharp lookout."

"There's no danger."

"I don't know. They might come down to see if their shell is all right."

Rasp! Rasp! Rasp!

The saw was now at work on the bottom of the old boat, and Jack had hard work to keep quiet.

"You are sure there's no one in here but ourselves?"

"Certainly not. I watched Jack's house, and saw his light had been put out at half-past ten, though he and Tom were still awake."

Rasp! Rasp!

"How are you getting on?"

"Bully! Keep a good lookout!"

"Rasp! Rasp!"

"There's no one there. How is it now?"

Rasp!

"That'll do. The High School boys won't feel so good to-morrow, I reckon."

"Let me sweep out the dust."

The cut won't show, for I have a fine saw, but when they get in and begin to pull the shell will split in two."

"What made it saw so easy?"

"'Twasn't any good. Come ahead. I'll throw the key in

the grass outside, so Ambrose can find it. It's deuced lucky he didn't miss it."

"You bet!"

Then the conspirators departed, closing the door after them, and when they had been gone half an hour or so, Jack and Tom left their hiding places and went back to their warm beds.

The next day the race was to take place, and it was a great occasion for Crofton, the excitement being wrought up to fever heat.

A grandstand had been erected, which would accommodate several thousand people, and all along the shore booths had been erected where the contests could be viewed.

Parties were made up from the surrounding towns, and wagons, buggies, omnibuses and stylish turnouts were driven to the spot in great numbers, an excursion party having come from Philadelphia even.

It was a brilliant scene, and the lake never looked so beautiful as it did that day, the course being as straight as a string for two miles, being in plain sight, and the shores affording, therefore, splendid positions from which to view the whole affair from start to finish.

As the time approached, the neighborhood of the lake was filled with one surging mass, carriages being mixed up with pedestrians, and every beholder was on the qui vive of excitement.

As the Academy crew of eight, with Harris as coxwain, appeared, there was a deafening shout, and Phin's face wore a triumphant look, as he and his fellows stepped into their places.

"Where's the High School crew?" was the general inquiry. "They are not going to back out, are they?"

Amid the general buzz of excitement, Hathaway and his men suddenly appeared in front of their boat-house with their every-day clothes on, and not in racing costume.

"How is this?" asked the judges, coming forward.

"Well, the fact of the matter is," said Jack, "our boat is damaged, and is unfit for use. Can't you let us off for a week?"

"And disappoint this brilliant assembly?" said Funk, senior. "Why, the elite of the State is present."

"You don't expect us to row with a damaged boat, do you?" asked Jack. "Will you let us off?"

"No, we won't," they all said.

"That's all bosh," said Phin. "You're afraid of us and want to get out of the race. Why don't you own up you're licked, like men?"

"But our boat is——"

"You sawed it yourself, then."

"Ha, ha! I've got you, my boy," thought Jack. "I thought I recognized you last night. I never said a word about sawing. You are convicted out of your own mouth."

"Will you own up licked?" said Phin. "You will be, anyhow, if you don't come to time. Blow the whistle, then, and we're off!"

A little steam launch, owned by Funk, and used as a starting point, blew a shrill whistle, and within five minutes thereafter the start must be made.

"I guess we'll row with you after all," said Jack coolly, throwing off an overcoat he wore and showing himself in full boating costume, the others doing the same.

"One of our boats is unfit for use," he continued, "but I didn't say which one. Shove her out, boys."

Then, to Phin's intense astonishment and disgust, the new shell which he supposed useless was launched, and the crew took their places and pulled to the starting place with a steady stroke.

Both boats got into line, and a small cannon was fired, and

then away they went, the High School craft taking the lead from the very start.

Then the wildest excitement took place, the two schools cheering their favorites and making the air resound with their cries.

"Go in, Jack," put in Walter.

"Pull faster, there, Tom! Do your level best, Harry, old man!"

"Bully for the High School!"

"'Rah for the Academy!"

"Hold your lead, boys! Don't let 'em get ahead of you."

"Pull up on 'em, Phin; don't let 'em lead all the way."

The High School was in excellent trim, and made a splendid show, their muscular arms and legs, broad chests and massive shoulders denoting great strength and wonderful staying powers.

Phin's men showed almost equal to them, as far as physical powers went, but they lacked the important faculty of pulling together harmoniously, and Harris was not cool enough for a coxwain, being vastly inferior to Vining in that respect.

The High School eight had the start in the beginning, but the Academy fellows soon pulled up on them, and it was an even thing for the next mile.

The boys ran along the bank, cheering and shouting, and the grandstand was perfectly white with waving handkerchiefs.

Phin was determined to win, but Jack led him a pretty chase, never allowing him to get ahead, but keeping him close alongside.

The stake-boat was rounded at the same moment by the two eights, and then the real excitement began, as the crews were now on the home stretch.

For the first half mile there seemed to be but little difference between the two, but then the strain of the long pull began to tell on the Academy crew, and it was seen that they had been doing their best all along, while the High School eight had been saving themselves.

"Now, my bullies!" shouted Jack, "show 'em what we can do!"

The strong young fellows bent to their oars with a will, and away they went, making a wide gap between them and their opponents at the very first moment.

It steadily increased, and it was now apparent to all that the High School would achieve a splendid victory, and the air fairly quivered with the tumult.

Cheers and bravos went up from thousands of throats, but unheeding all the excitement, Jack and his plucky lads pulled steadily, and left the Academy fellows nearly a quarter of a mile behind at the finish.

"You see that we can win, even if our boat is sawed," said Jack, as he walked up the plank float on his return to the boat-house; and then he and each of his companions were lifted upon the shoulders of the enthusiastic High School fellows and borne in triumph to the grandstand, where they received the congratulations of their friends, while the air resounded with cries of:

"Hurrah for the High School! Always up on time! Hurrah for Jack Hathaway, the boss of all boys!"

After the race was over Phin sneaked away, and they could see nothing of the contemptible cur, nor any of his fellows composing the crew.

Their boat was put away, and the house locked up, no one having a key being in sight.

"Are you sure that Phin was one of those fellows last night?" asked Tom of Jack, aside.

"Not positively sure, Tom, but I'll bet that it was his doing. Some of their men were there, anyhow, though there might have been outsiders with 'em."

Fitzroy came up at this moment, having returned, and he said at once:

"What is this nonsense about your boat being sawed, Hathaway? I've just heard about it."

"Come in and see for yourself," answered Jack, and he showed Fitzroy the old boat nearly sawed in half, a strong pressure upon the ends revealing the cut plainly.

"That's what I want to know. The new one would have been served that way if we hadn't changed its position on the trucks. I saw three fellows come into our boat-house last night and cut it, heard their voices, and partly recognized them."

"Who were they?"

"Some of you fellows."

"Do you think that we are mean and cowardly enough to do such a——"

"Not all of you, I confess, but I know some of them that would do it in a minute, or if they didn't dare themselves, would hire some outsider."

"This thing has got to be investigated, for a trick like that is too contemptible to be thought of for an instant."

Then he went away, and Jack said to his friends:

"There goes the fairest and squarest fellow in the whole Academy. It's a pity he don't leave and go with decent fellows."

"I don't believe he would dare," said Vining.

"Why not?"

"Oh, Funk's father has got his dad into some sort of a hole, I believe, and if he was to leave the Academy gang the old skunk would come down heavily on his governor, and make it hot for him. I believe he hates Funk and would get away if he dared."

"Hm! That's bad, for he's one of the few decent fellows in the Academy. He ought to be in the High School, for we want all the good chaps we can get."

No more was said about the matter of the damaged boat, although Jack and his chums kept a sharp lookout for perpetrators of the cowardly trick, which, but for an accident almost, might have resulted disastrously to the High School crew.

Two or three days after that Fitzroy went to Tom's house early one evening, and calling out, said cautiously:

"I think we can arrange that little matter to-night."

"The mill, do you mean?"

"Yes. Meet me with your man and a few select fellows at Bill Hunks' tavern at ten o'clock."

"Bill Hunks'? Why, that's the most notorious den in town. We can't fight there, man."

"Oh, yes, we can. We'll be undisturbed. No one will suspect us of going there."

"It will be expulsion if they do."

"We will chance that. It's the only place where we can have the thing out quietly. There'll be nobody but our own crowd. No sports or blacklegs will be admitted."

"Well, if that's the case, I'm with you. I'll have my man on hand, never fear."

"That's good. And may the best man win!"

"So be it. Shake!"

Then the two separated, each going his own way, to make arrangements for the resumption of the interrupted fight, the contest promising to be a bitter one.

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUESTION OF THE CHAMPIONSHIP IS SETTLED.

In a large barn, dimly lighted except in one corner, where several large lanterns were suspended from beams, and hung

against the rough boards, a dozen or more boys, and half as many men, were gathered, their faces expressing the most intense interest.

Ropes were stretched from the door, inclosing a twenty-foot space, and inside of the inclosure thus made were six boys, two of them stripped to the waist as if ready for a fight.

That was just what they were there for, and the reader will understand at once that they were Jack Hathaway and Phin Funk, come to settle the contest for the championship of the schools.

The other boys in the ring were the backers, and outside it were a dozen fellows, an equal number from each school being present, the seconds having arranged the matter in the interim between early evening and that time.

In addition to the boys, there were Bill Hunks, the proprietor of the place, and half a dozen sports, tough characters, to be sure, and men that the boys would have liked to exclude, but whom they could not very well put over.

Bill Hunks had promised that the affair should be quiet and orderly, and he stood ready to put out any obstreperous individual, his appearance denoting that he could do it with the greatest ease.

"Now, young gents," he said, "are you all ready?"

"Our side is," answered Mayhew.

"And so is ours," added Fitzroy.

"Then sail in, and may the best man win."

"I'll lay two to one on the handsome chap," said one of the sports, producing a roll of bills.

"Done," said one of his comrades, and the money was handed to Bill to hold.

"Who's to be referee in this case?" said Bill. "We must do everything accordin' to rules. I ain't interested one way or t'other, and I'll serve if ye like."

"What do you say?" asked Tom.

"I'm willing," replied both of Phin's men.

"I don't care," said Phin. "He's as good as any one, I suppose."

"The best man we could get," put in Jack.

"All right, then. Go ahead."

The two lads advanced to the middle of the ring, shook hands, and stood facing each other, both on guard.

"Time!" called the umpire, and then the battle began.

The attitudes of both boys were very fine, and were regarded with admiration by their friends.

Jack held his right arm across his breast, his left arm lower down, with the elbow close to his side, and his body stooped just a little.

Phin's position was more striking, but no better than Jack's in the eyes of the knowing ones.

His right arm, sinewy and muscular, was held across his breast, while his left moved loosely back and forth, as if ready to fly out upon an instant's warning.

But little time was lost in sparring, and then Phin let out with his left, which fell short, being quickly followed by a blow from Jack, which just reached his adversary's forehead.

Jack then tried another blow of the same kind, and delivered a more telling crack, receiving a spent blow from Phin on the side of the face.

A little lively sparring followed, when Phin let fly at Jack's stomach, the latter jumping aside in time to miss it.

Phin followed him up with the same tactics, however, for two successive times, Jack's agility saving him a crack on each occasion.

He was now right against the rope in Phin's corner, and both boys clinched and wrestled for a few moments, when at it they went right and left, Jack driving Phin before him, and in a twinkling getting his head in chancery, and raining heavy right-handers upon his face.

Phin dropped while he was getting the blows, the last one

landing on the side of his head when his body touched the ground.

"Foul! Foul!" yelled Phin's men.

"Fair! Fair!" shouted Jack's supporters.

In the meantime, both boys had been taken to their corners and attended to by their seconds, first blood being claimed for Jack and allowed.

When the boys stepped up for the second round Phin's face was flushed, and he looked somewhat the worse for the rough handling he had received, though he was still plucky.

Jack crossed the score at once, and let fly at Phin's face, getting a heavy right-hander on his own left side, but with very little force.

Phin's blows seemed all ineffective, in fact, and unlike the terrible cracks which Jack gave, and he was evidently getting discouraged.

A few passes followed, and then both got down to half-arm work, putting in the blows at a lively rate.

Phin seemed muscle bound, and though he tried hard to punish Jack, the latter was too spry for him, and in a few minutes he planted a stunner on his left jaw, which brought him down.

He was lifted up and carried to Fitzroy's knee, looking badly used up, his face covered with blood, it being evident that he was no match for Jack, who was as yet unscarred.

When time was called for the third round Jack sprang to the scratch and opened the proceedings by sending his left square into Phin's face.

"Good boy, Jack!" cried the High School fellows, who had kept pretty quiet all along, in striking contrast to the Academy boys, who had been constantly cheering Phin, and egging him on to do his utmost.

"Who wants to bet on the 'Cademy cuss now?" asked one of the sports.

"I do," said Harris. "I'll lay you even that our man wins yet. He's only shamming."

"Then it's the funniest shamming I ever seed," snorted the sport, "fur ye can't tell it from a real licking. Keep yer money, kiddy; I don't want to rob yer."

By this time the two lads had closed, and Jack utterly astonished everybody by the rapid way in which he got in his sledge-hammer blows, every one of them telling with good effect.

Then a short tussle took place in Phin's corner, which terminated the round, and the fight as well, Jack giving Phin a cross-buttock, which brought him heavily to the ground, with Jack on top.

He was taken to his corner, and it was at once seen that there was no use in continuing the fight, for to punish him further would have been mere brutality.

A hasty consultation was held; Phin muttered a few words, and then Fitzroy threw up the sponge in token of defeat.

"That 'ere was one of the fairest fights I ever seed," said Bill Hunks. "You handled your dukes just like a professional, Mister Jack, and you're a credit to the school and to the town."

"Reckon if any one tries to tackle him he'll get a s'prise party," said one of the sports, the fellow that had bet on Jack. "He's a beauty, he is, and game to the backbone."

"Well, is it settled who's the boss now?" asked Jack, putting on his clothes.

"You've licked our man, but you needn't crow," answered Fitzroy.

"I'm not crowing. I only want to know if you are satisfied?"

"Yes."

"For the present," muttered Phin, under his breath, "but I'll get even with you yet, blow me if I don't by fair means or foul, I don't care which."

"Come along, Jack," said Tom. "It's getting late!"

"Yes, and if I don't be careful I'll be locked out," said Jack, when they were outside, "for I forgot to tell our coachman to leave things so I could get in."

"Stay at our house," said Tom.

"No, I guess not."

"By Jinks, there'll be lively times in school to-morrow, when it's known that Phin got beaten," said Charlie Vining, with a laugh.

"You bet. By George, Jack, you handled yourself even better than you did the first time."

"Well, boys, good-night," said Jack, his way leading him in an opposite direction to that of the other fellows, and off he started.

It was quite late, and there was no one to be seen on the street, the whole town being wrapped in a solemn stillness unbroken by any noise.

Presently Jack felt that he was being followed by some one, and he quickened his walk, not because he was at all frightened, but in order that he might come out into the light, and, if possible, see whether his suspicions were correct or not.

After walking a few rods, he suddenly stopped and, turning, beheld a crouching figure in the shadow of a fence on the other side of the way.

Then he turned down a street, walked a short distance, and then wheeled rapidly and ran back, coming all at once upon the man whom he suspected of shadowing him.

"What do you want?" he said quickly. "What are you following me for? Who are you, anyhow?"

"Could you give a poor bloke a quarter for a night's lodging?" asked the man, evidently taken aback.

"No, I couldn't; and if you dare to follow me any further I'll give you the worst licking you ever had."

"I ain't follerin' you," replied the fellow sheepishly, surveying Jack's compact, well-built form with evident alarm.

"You know you're lying! Some one has hired you to follow me. What's that you've got in your hand?"

"I ain't got noth—"

Jack's hand suddenly flew out, and took the man, who looked like a tramp, full in the face, knocking him back several feet.

At the same time he dropped whatever he had had in his hand to the ground, and Jack hastily picked it up.

It proved to be a short, thick "billy," tipped with lead, and in the hands of a determined man would prove a most dangerous weapon.

"By Jove, if that's your game, I'll show you how the thing feels," said Jack, advancing toward the tramp, who suddenly made off as if the sheriff was after him.

"It's about time you cleared out," said Jack, with a laugh, "for if I gave you one blow with this, you'd have a headache for a week."

Then he walked rapidly towards home, murmuring as he went:

"The villain's object was evidently robbery, for I don't know who would hire him to follow me. There isn't any one bad enough for that in this town."

He looked back presently, after he had walked some little distance, but no one was to be seen.

"I didn't like the looks of the fellow at all," he mused, as he continued his walk. "I don't remember having seen him about here before. He must have intended to knock me down with this billy, and then rob me. Well, I think I've sickened him of that for to-night, at all events."

In about five minutes more he reached the house, but all was dark, and after a few minutes' reconnoitering he realized that he was locked out.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FIENDISH PLOT DISCOVERED AND PREVENTED.

"This is a pretty go," muttered Jack to himself. "It won't do to arouse the governor, because he'll be suspicious, and I can't wake Mike without routing out the whole house, for he sleeps like a log, and nothing short of a fire-bell rung in his ears would wake him until he's had his snooze out."

Then he tried the stable door, and the back and front doors of the house, but found all secure and not a light in any part of the house.

"This is a fine start," he said. "I wish now I'd gone home with Tom. Hello, what's that?"

Two figures were stealing in at the front gate and talking in whispers, while every now and then Jack could hear a muttered oath.

He quickly dropped into the high grass, and lay concealed, the two men passing within a few feet of him.

"You're sure this is the house?" said a voice, which Jack instantly recognized as that of the tramp he had struck not long before.

"To be sure. Why didn't you follow him if you wasn't certain?"

"He got the drop on me."

"Will you go halves if I help you do the job?"

"I'll give you a tenner."

"That's all right; but as you didn't get a chance to lay him out, what are you going to do?"

"Set the barn on fire, to get even with him for plugging me, and then lay for him when he comes out and do the other feller's work."

"He promised you a good lot of boodle if you done it slick?"

"I should snicker, and I'm goin' to do it, too."

"Some one has hired him," thought Jack. "I'd like to know who it is."

"Ye've got a soft thing, Rags," said the second man.

"How so?" asked the first.

"Why, easy enough. You plugs the young feller, and perhaps lays him out—you ain't no soft hitter, you know—and you gets paid for the job."

"You bet!"

"Then you goes to the other chap and you threatens him with givin' the hull snap away if he don't shell out handsomely."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"An' ye keeps the thing up until he'll be glad to pay ye a big sum, and send ye out o' the country besides, to keep ye quiet."

"But he might split on me if I ran him too hard, for makin' a stiff outer this feller."

"Ye needn't make a stiff outer him, but just lay him up for six months or so."

"But s'pose I did?"

"All you'd have to do would be to keep your mouth shut, and you can just bet the rich young bloke 'd do the same, and pay you well in the bargain."

"Suppose he should split?"

"On you? And git himself in a hole? Not much, Rags! He knows when he's safe, and he'd rather be bled than choked to death."

"Could they hang him?"

"For gittin' another feller ter kill this young bloke? Well, I wouldn't want to stand his chances, that's all."

"But I say, Whisky, let's get to work. I've got some matches, and some rags, and some kerosene. We'll bust a hole in ther stable winder, chuck the stuff all in among the hay, and then mope."

"Oh, you villains!" thought Jack.

"That'll do first class, but, I say, won't the house catch afire, too?" asked the man called Whisky.

"Don't care if it does," hissed Rags, as the two walked towards the stable, Jack creeping noiselessly after them. "I'd like ter roast the young cuss, blame him, to pay for the tickler he gave me on the bugle. My gosh! how that feller kin hit."

"Sh! don't ye hear nothin'?"

"Now! There's the winder; let me get on your back, and I'll bust a hole and chuck in the stuff."

"By George, it's lucky I was locked out, after all," thought Jack. "What a fury this man must be to imperil half a dozen lives just to be revenged upon me."

Then he crept forward again and lay flat upon his face, for there was nothing behind which he might hide, and did not want to be discovered yet, if he could help it.

"I mustn't let them get that stuff inside, or poor Mike will be roasted alive. He would never wake up, and the horses might trample him to death."

"Stand steady," whispered Rags. "Ye'll make me fall."

"Haven't ye got a light yet?"

"No; wait a jiffy."

Crash!

The villain had broken a hole in the window panes, and looking around and listening to determine whether he has been heard or not, whispered:

"Stand steady, Whisky, and I'll do the thing in just two shakes. I'll teach the blamed young cub to slug me in the teeth, blast his pesky young liver!"

"I'd like to know mighty well who has put them up to this fiendish job," thought Jack. "I'd make Mr. Rags feel sick, and that would be no name for the other fellow's trouble. I didn't think there was any one in Crofton so contemptible as to set a villain like this upon a fellow. Hallo!"

A small tongue of flame suddenly shot up from between the tramp's fingers, and Jack saw that he was holding a match which he shielded with one hand, while he felt in his ragged pocket for something with the other.

Whisky stood in a stooping posture under the window, with Rags perched upon his shoulder ready to throw the burning stuff inside, where it would imperil the safety of the whole building, there being a bale of hay close to the window inside.

"How are you getting on, Rags? My back is most broke."

"All hunky! I've got a bully good light. Now for it!"

Then there was the sound of rushing feet, followed by a thud and a startled cry from Rags.

Two pair of hobnailed boots beat a hasty tattoo upon the stone walk, and two able-bodied vagabonds lay sprawled out under the window.

"Ugh! My backbone is driven through the top of my head."

"Cheese it, Rags! Skip, you bloke, or you'll get run in!"

Spat!

Spat!

Plug!

Jack's fists flew out right and left, taking Whisky in the two eyes, while the toe of his heavy boot was planted with no gentle touch upon the seat of the other tramp's trousers.

Plug!

Whack!

They were no gentle kicks that fell upon the miserable Rags, and he jumped to his feet, only to be sent upon his head in the watering trough.

Splash!

Whack!

He sputtered and floundered, getting a stunning kick in the seat as he arose, which sent him flying through space and

brought him up against the pump with a force that nearly brained him.

"Set the stable on fire, will you?" said Jack. "Take that and clear out!"

That was a brace of kicks which fairly lifted Rags over the fence, and sprawled him out upon the graveled walk, bleeding, sore and utterly disgusted with all earthly things.

Whisky had already made off at the top of his speed, and Jack hastened back to the stable to see whether or not Rags might have thrown any of the inflammable material inside, a mere scrap of which, falling upon the hay, might destroy the whole stable, and, perhaps, the house as well.

Jack soon satisfied himself that there was no danger, and then he stood gazing around thoughtfully, presently muttering to himself.

"I must discover who is at the bottom of this affair, which might have proved serious. Is it possible that I have an enemy so base? I must keep my eyes open, and if he is discovered, I promise him that he shall not escape lightly."

Jack feared to leave the house while there was any chance of the tramps returning and finishing their work, and yet he did not like to arouse those in the house, and to awaken the coachman was almost an impossibility.

While he was cogitating the matter, the clocks upon the two schools struck one, and in a few moments the church clocks followed suit.

Presently he remembered the broken pane of glass, and climbing up he deftly inserted his hand carefully and pushed back the windowlatch. Then shoving up the sash he sprang lightly in, closed and locked the window, and speaking gently to the horses, which were beginning to grow restive, but recognizing his voice became quiet in an instant, ascended to the loft and went to sleep in the spare bed which was provided for extra hands whenever they were required about the place.

He was up betimes, and slipping out by the window, was whistling around the door when the coachman came out in the morning.

Presently he entered the house by the back door, the servants being up by this time, and slipping up to his own room unnoticed, tumbled up the bed, and disarranged things so as to excite no suspicion of his not having slept there all night.

Then he told his father that he had discovered an attempt upon the part of tramps to burn the stable, and suggested that the windows be covered with wire netting, and that other precautions be taken which would prevent the possibility of a similar attempt being successful in the future.

Mr. Hathaway was greatly surprised at the news, and complimented Jack upon his coolness, little suspecting the real nature of the case, and promising that the matter should be attended to, which was done at once.

That day it became noised all about the town, among the boys, that Hathaway had defeated Funk, and the High School fellows were in proportionately high spirits, the more the details of the affair came out.

Phin was in a rage, and kept himself away from school for two days, so as to escape the taunts of his rivals and the reproaches of his friends, but every now and then the thought would spring to his lips:

"Never mind; I'll fix that young pup before long, no matter what it costs."

CHAPTER IX.

THE HIGH SCHOOL AGAIN COMES OUT AHEAD.

"I'll tell you what you ought to do, pop," said Jack, suddenly, a few days afterwards, as he and his father sat in the

library one evening, after dinner, Jack studying and Mr. Hathaway reading the paper.

"Well, Jack, some new scheme?"

"Yes, pop!"

"For the benefit of the Free High School?"

"Decidedly, and for the town as well."

"Out with it, Jack; don't keep me in suspense."

"You know there is no railroad connection between this town and Philadelphia?"

"I know there isn't, and sometimes I don't fancy taking a ten-mile drive to catch the train on the Pennsylvania road."

"There ought to be a branch road from here to the nearest station."

"Certainly there ought."

"It would be a great convenience to many of the citizens."

"Indeed, it would, for the out-of-the-way situation of the town is one great drawback to its advancement."

"Suppose you start a railroad, pop? It'll be a grand scheme."

"Are you crazy, Jack?"

"Not a bit of it."

"But my dear boy——"

"Now just wait, pop. Our school proposes to teach boys to be useful, practical men, and not mere molly-coddles who can construe a Greek verb or two, and are good for nothing that is of practical value."

"Of course."

"Then let's teach 'em engineering, telegraphing, surveying, and so forth."

"They are taught, Jack."

"Not in a practical way, though. Now, suppose the boys construct a railroad from here to the next station, run the trains themselves, act as telegraph operators—for you must have a telegraph line with a railroad, you know—and at the same time, while they are learning something practical, do a good turn for the town."

"By Jove, Jack, you've got a great head on your shoulders. It will help the town wonderfully."

"Our cars and locomotives can be made smaller, and we can make the road narrow gauge, which will save a deal of expense."

"Without doubt."

"The boys can run the first train down in the morning for the accommodation of the business men, and return in time for school. Then in the afternoon they can run down and bring you all back."

"Well, anything else?" for Jack seemed to hesitate.

"Why, yes. The regular engineer can run one or two trains in the middle of the day for lazy folks, and people who want to go shopping or to attend the matinees could go also on that train."

"Hurrah, Jack! You are more practical than I thought you were."

"And you think the scheme a good one?"

"Excellent. It will build up the town wonderfully."

"To be sure, and then you can build a big summer hotel, and Crofton will be one of our most popular summer resorts."

"I'll think of it, Jack."

"And the railroad——"

"Oh, that's settled. I'll take the matter up at once."

So he did, and the result was that several moneyed men of the town were willing to go into anything in which John Hathaway was interested, and the capital stock of the new railway company, strictly a private concern, by the way, was quickly subscribed, and operations were begun at once.

Under the instruction of careful engineers and surveyors the boys were soon able to go to work, and the High School was kept open all summer for those who desired instruction.

and nearly all the town scholars availed themselves of the opportunity.

The road was built rapidly, the boys doing all but the rough work of grading, digging and carrying rails, though that was done under their supervision.

When Funk got wind of what was going on, he determined to build an opposition road, for, of course, it would never do to allow the High School to get such a big start on the Academy as that.

People did not see the necessity of two roads, however, and Funk was obliged to stand nearly half the expense himself, Messrs. Fitzroy, Broderick and Harris contributing something at Funk's urgent suggestion, and the rival road began to hurry up, so as to be completed at the same time as the other.

The boys of the Academy did not do as much work on their road, however, as the High School lads had done on theirs, as the time was too short; and this was where the latter had the advantage, being practical workers, while their rivals were but learners.

The town was a busy one that summer, and enterprises of all descriptions received a great start, new buildings going up on every hand, and the population increasing one-third in a few short months.

By dint of strenuous effort the Academy road was completed, and announced to begin running trains upon the first day of September—the same day that the High School road would begin running.

The latter road was by far the better of the two, however, although Funk promised great things in time.

A telegraph line had been started, and was already in operation, Charlie Vining being chief operator; and as the necessities of the case required a post office, one was established accordingly, and Vining, senior, was appointed by the President to the position of postmaster, although Funk tried hard to get one of his satellites appointed.

The momentous day at last arrived, a glorious autumn day, and as both schools had begun at that time the town was crowded, the scene at the depot being a brilliant one.

The two stations were close together, and, indeed, the rival roads ran side by side nearly all the way, Hathaway's being a little the longer.

Funk had drummers and shouters out inducing people to take his road, but Hathaway resorted to no such catchpenny measures, being resolved to let his road speak for itself.

He did not care if the rival road did carry more passengers the first trip, so long as his did the better business afterwards, and so he simply let the thing go upon its own merits, and calmly awaited developments.

Jack sat in the cab, acting as engineer, having devoted a great deal of his time to running an engine during the summer, so that he was now quite proficient, and close to him was Tom Mayhew, who was to be his fireman, Walter Ambrose being conductor of the train.

Not far away stood the rival train, Phin Funk being in the cab, with a skilled engineer by his side, for he had not improved his time as well as Jack had, and the engineer would not trust him to run the engine alone.

A regular fireman and brakeman had been engaged, the Academy boys thinking themselves too tony for that, though all the employees upon the other train were from the High School, the boys being too wise to take such foolish notions in their heads as their rivals.

"All aboard!" shouted Walter, who was dressed in regulation style, blue suit, with brass buttons and gold-laced cap.

The passengers were all in their places. Jack received his signal and opened the throttle; Conductor Ambrose jumped aboard, and away went the High School train on its first trip, on time to the second.

The run down would be made in twenty minutes, as there

were no stops upon the way as yet, and after waiting ten minutes at the terminus, the train would return, giving the boys time to get into school at nine o'clock.

Puff, puff, puff!

Toot, toot, toot!

Away went both trains side by side, Jack not putting on full steam as yet, though Phin was gesticulating wildly to the engineer, and trying to induce him to go faster so as to beat Jack.

Every window which looked out upon the other train was crowded with faces, and as a great many boys had gone on the first trip, the excitement was great, words being bandied back and forth from the two trains in the liveliest manner.

"Go sell your engine for old iron!" yelled one of the High School crowd, as Jack began to draw ahead of his rival.

"Don't you crow till you're out of the woods."

"We're out now, and you'll be left half a mile behind."

"Don't you believe it."

"All right; wait and see. Hurrah, boys, Jack's gaining more on him."

So he was, and as the rear car of Jack's train passed the engine of the other, the High School boys raised a deafening shout and made the air fairly ring with three rattling cheers and a tiger for Hathaway.

The other engineer put on more steam, but the grade of the High School road was better than the other one, and the traveling was faster and easier, a rapid rate on the other road causing positive discomfort to the passengers.

Phin Funk shouted and swore at his engineer, and tried to run the train himself, but the man declared that he would stop the train and put the unruly young man off if it cost him his position, unless he behaved himself, and Phin desisted.

Jack gained steadily, although he did not put on near as much steam as he might have, and when the station was reached, he was three-quarters of a mile ahead of the Academy train.

Had not the conductor of the Pennsylvania train been good natured and waited for the stragglers, they would have been left, and been compelled to wait an hour before they could get into the city, but Jack did not want to carry his triumph too far, and so he spoke a few words to the conductor, and easily induced him to wait.

When the other passengers came in, the High School boys laughed at them, and Ambrose said:

"If you want to be on time, gentlemen, take our road. We make connections every time."

"I'll bet I'll beat you going back," blustered Phin.

"I'll take you up."

At the appointed time the two trains started off together, but in spite of Jack's having further to go, he beat his rival road even worse than on the down trip, and had housed his engine and was starting for school when Phin arrived.

"Never mind," growled Funk to himself, "I'll find a way to beat him yet, if I have to wreck his train."

CHAPTER X.

THE RIVER BITTEN.

In the afternoon, when the boys ran down to bring back the business men, Jack was again ahead, both going and coming, and Phin was beside himself with rage.

The next morning many of those who had gone on the Academy train the day before went on the other one, and finding it so much more comfortable, resolved to patronize it steadily.

A few of those at once bought commutation tickets, and Funk, hearing of this, advertised to sell yearly tickets at a much less rate than Hathaway's road did, though the price for a less time than that remained the same.

Funk began making the much-needed improvements on his road, but Phin, keeping his own counsel, determined to carry out his threats of getting even with Jack.

One night, a week or so after the roads had begun operations, he met a rough-looking man by appointment in a low saloon of the town, for these excrescences had grown up as the population increased, and made a bargain with him.

"If you make that train late I'll give you five dollars," said the angry Phin.

"You can rely on me," said the man, who was no other than Rags, the tramp. "I'll do anything to pay him off for the licking he game me t'other night."

"That was all your own fault, for I told you to be careful. You ought to have got ahead and waited for him behind a fence or tree. Then you could have slugged him easily enough."

Then it was Phin himself who had hired this miserable creature to waylay Jack and beat him?

It was, indeed, for he was lost to all sense of honor, and was ready to take any mean advantage which his depraved brain could suggest.

"Mind that you do it well, now," said Phin.

"Gimme a dollar now, won't you? I'm dyin' fur a drink."

"You can have all the rum you want, providing you don't get drunk, but I won't give you a cent until you've done the job. It isn't my style to pay in advance for anything."

He might have added, with perfect truth, that it wasn't his style to pay for anything if he could possibly held it, but Rags understood that without his saying it.

The next morning, as the two trains were rattling along—Jack's ahead, as usual—our hero saw a man on the track, waving his hands wildly and shouting for him to stop.

Jack slacked up, and coming to a standstill, asked the man what the trouble was, the other train going ahead of him.

"There's a broken rail just around that curve yonder, and I seen it and thought I'd let you know."

"How far is it?"

"'Bout half a mile," answered the man, and as Jack began to scan his face closely, he turned and walked away.

"It's that villain Rags," he muttered, "and I'll bet this is a put-up job. I don't believe there is anything the matter at all."

Then he went ahead, somewhat slower than his usual rate, keeping a sharp lookout for danger; but after going two or three miles and seeing nothing, he became convinced that the whole thing was but a trick, and he increased his speed, reaching the terminus just behind Phin.

The latter crowed a good deal at having beaten him, and Jack knew by this that he was at the bottom of the trick, but said nothing, being resolved to bide his time and find out the whole truth.

On the run back he beat Phin easily, and again in the afternoon, and Phin's followers had nothing to say when Tom Mayhew said:

"You couldn't have beaten us this morning if we hadn't stopped for that tramp, and I'll bet you put up a job on us so as to get ahead."

Two mornings afterward, when they had gone about three miles, Jack suddenly clapped on the safety brakes, and shut off steam, bringing the train to a sudden standstill.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom.

"Drunken man on the track."

Tom looked out, and, sure enough, there lay a man right

across the rails, evidently unconscious, and if Jack had not seen him in time, he was in a fair way to being killed.

"Get some one to help you pull him off, Tom," said Jack, "and hurry, for I don't want those fellows to beat us again."

Conductor Ambrose had jumped down to see why the train had stopped, and Tom called to him to come and help get the man off the track.

There were several of the fellows on the train besides the regular employees, and these now came forward to investigate things.

Tom and Walter pulled the man off the track and stood him upon his feet, when he suddenly walked off as sober as a judge.

"The fellow has been shamming," cried Jack. "Go after him, boys, and give him a regular old-fashioned thrashing. I'll stop and take you up when I come back. Jump in, Tom; get aboard, Walt."

Rags—for it was that despicable creature who had been upon the track—began to increase his pace, but the boys made after him at a lively pace, and soon surrounded him, proceeding to carry out Jack's orders to the letter.

They kicked and cuffed and belabored him, first on one side, then on the other; they pulled and tugged, and pushed and dragged him in the mud; they stoned and pelted and hammered him, until the breath was fairly knocked out of him, and finally ceased only when they were too tired to strike another blow or give the wretch another kick.

It was certainly the worst thrashing he had ever had, for both eyes were blackened, his nose was bleeding, three teeth had been knocked down his throat, there was a cut on each cheek, his clothes were nearly torn from his back, his legs were so sore that he could hardly limp, and the seat of his trousers was actually worn out from the kicks that had been bestowed upon it.

To add to all these injuries, he was finally pitched head first into the ditch, and when he emerged, all dripping and covered with mud, he was the most melancholy looking object that was ever seen.

"You will stop our train, will you?" said Mayburn, one of the High School boys, as Rags moved on. "Try it again and see how it will work."

"We'll send you to a hospital if you do."

"Or to the boneyard," facetiously remarked a third.

"And serve the Academy terriers the same dirty trick if they come any more of their dirty, mean dodges on us," said Harry Sanders, who was one of those who had remained behind.

Meanwhile, Jack had done his best, but Phin had gained too big a lead, and had forced the engineer to cram on all the steam the engine would take, so that had not the Pennsylvania conductor waited, Jack's passengers would have all been late.

"Something's up," muttered this individual, "or the young fellow wouldn't be late again this morning. Seein' that I waited for the other fellows for his asking, I'm goin' to give him all the leeway I can."

In the afternoon, however, the conductor came to Tom, and said on the sly:

"I've got orders not to wait for your two trains after 8:20, but I'll look out for you. I heard of the dodge the other fellows played on you, and if they don't look out they'll get left some fine morning."

That night the wretched Rags, having patched himself up as well as he could, met Phin in the saloon, and said:

"I've earned that 'ere twenty-five dollars you promised me for this morning's job, but I won't be able to take any comfort for a month."

"That's all right," said Phin, handing the man some money. "If they lick you, I'll pay you more. You'll soon get used to

it. You needn't wait until they pull you off the track, but get up and run when they make a good, full stop."

"Do you want me to try it again?" asked the man gloomily.

"Yes, confound his picture, I want to beat 'em bad. That conductor won't wait for them any more, and I want to have all their passengers made late, just for once."

"So they'll come over to your road?"

"Yes. If you stop 'em to-morrow, I'll give you the same as I gave you to-day, whether you get a licking or not."

"Put it there, boss," said Rags, "and if I hold out, I'll stop 'em every mornin' for a month."

"They won't thrash you if you look out for yourself."

"You bet I won't give 'em a chance. Did you ever see such a lookin' cuss?"

"You are pretty well used up, for a fact."

"That's all hunky. I've got it in for every one of them young blokes, and me and Whisky will lay for 'em some night and warm their jackets for 'em."

The next morning the trains started off on time, as usual, Jack putting on full speed from the start, and getting a good lead upon Phin, in spite of the improved condition of the Academy road, when, after going about five miles, Tom suddenly cried:

"There's that confounded tramp again."

Jack looked out of the little window of the cab, and saw the man lying upon the track as on the day previous.

"Let him lie there if he likes," said Jack, giving the alarm signal. "I'll warn him off, and then——"

"What?"

"Run over him if he doesn't get up."

"But he may be really drunk."

"Serves him right, then. He is no more drunk than I am."

"Is he trying the same trick he did yesterday?"

"Of course, and if he doesn't get up I'll run over him as sure as fate. It'll only be one tramp the less, anyhow, and nobody will cry, I reckon."

They were fast approaching the spot where the tramp lay, and as there were no indications of their stopping, the man suddenly raised his head, gave one glance at the swift-coming train, and springing to his feet, jumped off the track, just in time to escape being struck by the pilot.

"What did I tell you?" said Jack, with a laugh. "Phin's trick didn't work this time."

"Phin's?"

"Oh, he got this fellow to play this racket on us, of course, for there's no one else mean enough in the whole Academy. They'll get sick of that fellow before long."

Jack reached the end of the road more than a mile ahead of Phin, and as time was up, the conductor of the regular train started off just as soon as Jack's passengers got aboard.

When Phin arrived, he found that the shoe was on the other foot, and that, instead of getting Jack into a scrape, he was in trouble himself.

Funk, senior, stormed, raved and abused the railroad company, until an official pointed out a large, printed placard, which announced that on and after that date the Philadelphia accommodation would leave this station promptly at 8:20, irrespective of the arrival of other trains.

There was nothing to be said, of course, and Phin realized that he had been caught in his own trap.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ACCIDENT.

Old Funk was so mad at the idea of the rival road beating his, and so chagrined at being left, that for several minutes he could not say a word.

He saw that his road would lose patronage if something was not done to allay the wrath of the business men who were anxious to reach the city, and fearing to lose them, he at once went off and chartered a special engine and car to take them to Philadelphia.

This cost him a pretty penny, but it saved him from losing more, as the angry passengers were pacified, and made up their minds that old Funk was not so bad, after all.

Had he not done this, they would have abandoned the Academy road, and given their patronage to the other, but Funk was shrewd enough to know this, and therefore got out by the only loophole left.

"He can't afford to charter a special train every morning," said Jack to Tom, as they were returning, "and he won't always be so lucky as to find an engine here. This shows what a fellow gets by being so confounded mean. If Phin had not played those tricks on us the other train would have waited for him."

Rags appeared again that night, and at once opened the ball by saying:

"Do you want me to try that dodge on again tomorrer?"

"Not unless you want to be run over. I don't suppose you are anxious for that."

"You bet I ain't. I know when I've got enough. I don't believe 'twould be much wuss'n the lickin' those blokes giv' me though."

"Do you want to earn a hundred dollars?" said Phin suddenly.

"Do I want to? Well I should giggle to blush if I didn't."

"Then throw that train off the track."

"To-morrow?"

"No; wait until next week."

"I think I will, and the week after that; and when that comes I'll tell ye how much longer you've got to wait till I kin tell you again."

"What do you mean?"

"That I ain't goin' ter git my neck into trouble for no hundred dollars. What do you take me fur?"

"Name your own price."

"Five hundred dollars down, and another five hundred when the thing is done, and a safe passage to Canada if anybody tumbles."

"I won't give you any such ridiculous price. There are dozens of men that would do it for fifty dollars, and jump at the chance."

"Well, perhaps they might, but fellers like me don't come cheap, by no means."

"Do you want to be locked up as a vagrant?"

"I ain't anxious just now, for the winter is a good ways off yet."

"You'll find yourself in jail if you don't take what I offer."

"Do you dare threaten me?" said the man, with an oath, dropping his careless, impudent manner in an instant and glaring like a demon.

Phin retreated, and the man continued fiercely:

"You miserable, dirty, low coward, do you dare to tell the likes o' me what I shall do and what I shall not do? You'll put me in jail, will ye? Well, I kin talk in jail as well as out of it, and it'll be an easy matter to tell somebody who bribed me to give him a whack over the head with a billy the other night."

Phin gasped, but then said in a blustering manner:

"Who would take an old tramp's word against the son of one of the richest men in town? Don't you suppose that I could fix it so you wouldn't get a chance to talk?"

"Well, don't ye go to threatenin' me unless you mean business," said Rags, calming down a bit. "I could ruin you, I guess, if I chose to, even s'posin' I did get into quod for it. They's more'n one thing I could tell 'em, I reckon."

"You dare not tell anything; but never mind that. Will you do what I want you to?"

"For the price I told yer, yes; for anythin' less'n that, no."

"We'll see whether you will or not. I'll give you until next week to think about it. If you imagine you're going to scare me, you're away off."

"It's a mighty big risk I'm a-takin', young feller. S'pose some fellers should get killed?"

"I don't care if they do," hissed Phin; "that's just what I want."

"But that's a hangin' matter if a feller's found out."

Phin paled for an instant, but then swore and blustered, and finally said:

"I thought you were willing to do anything for a little money, but you're no good; you're scared. This young fellow's crowd gave you the worst licking you ever had, and yet you dare not be revenged upon 'em. Bah! You haven't got the spunk of a mouse!"

"I haven't? Well, perhaps I haven't. Will you make it two hundred?"

"If you succeed, I will."

"And if I don't?"

"Lay him out in good shape, and I'll give you a hundred. Kill him"—and the words were fairly hissed out—"and I'll give you two hundred dead sure. I haven't forgotten the pounding he gave me yet, and I swore to be revenged, on him."

"Then it's a bargain. Good-night!"

"Go to blazes!" said Phin, and he walked out, looking like a lord with his head thrown so high.

When he had gone out, Rags went to a closet, opened the door, and revealed the form of his partner in crime, the man called Whisky.

"You heard what he said," asked Rags, "every word of it?"

"You bet; and we can make as pretty a case of blackmail out o' it as ever ye see."

"He won't stand no sich nonsense. I've tried that on him, but it won't work."

"Won't it? S'pose you gets ketched, and gives him away?"

"He'll deny it."

"But you have got a witness, my boy. Don't ye go for to puttin' yer precious neck in danger, but just listen to me. We kin both on us make a handsome stake out'n this 'ere."

"But I'm bound to get even with them young duffers for the lickin' they gimme. Ye didn't 'spect I'd forgot it, did ye?"

"That's all hunk; get even wi' 'em; but do it in bounds. Plug 'em in the snoot, or suthin' o' that sort. This 'ere killin' business won't work."

"Hm! ye think I'm scairt. Wouldn't I 've killed him the other night when I was goin' ter set the barn on fire? Course I would. What's chewin' ye, anyhow?"

The wily tramp had never intended to dissuade Rags from his purpose; but had worked upon him so as to make him more determined than ever.

"That's all right," he said; "but don't ye lose sight o' the good thing this other bloke has put into yer fist. It'll last ye a lifetime, fur ye kin allus hold it over his head."

On Saturdays the boys did not run the trains, and on this occasion Jack proposed to go up into the mountains back of the town, taking with him Mayhew, Sanders, Walter and Phil Ambrose.

As the boys reached the foot of the hill, they did not notice a couple of evil-looking fellows lurking in the bushes and watching their every movement with the deepest interest.

Every word they uttered was listened to by these men, who, as soon as they were hidden by the trees, slipped away, and by making a detour which involved considerable climbing, reached the mountain ahead of them.

The boys chatted and laughed, never once thinking of danger, and after reaching a point of the cliff where they could look off upon the town, the river and the city in the far distance, sat down under the shade of a tree to partake of the excellent lunch they had brought with them.

Behind them the hill rose with a considerable slope, bare of trees for some distance, there being a sort of natural landing some fifty feet up, where huge boulders were scattered about, and a few trees and thick shrubs broke the monotony of the scene.

"This is fine," said Jack, when they were about half through their lunch. "The air up here is grand, and the view not to be exceeded."

"To say nothing of the cold roast chicken," said Harry Sanders, with a laugh. "You always seem to know just what a fellow wants, Jack."

"He knew what Phin Funk wanted pretty well," added Tom, polishing off a wing bone, "and that was what this chicken had, a good basting."

The boys all laughed at this, when suddenly Jack turned his head, and said quickly:

"What's that?"

"Nothing but some loose stones rattling down," answered Harry. "They are all the time——"

"By Jove! Look out!"

A decidedly big loose stone came tumbling down at this moment, and bounding right among the boys, took a leap and flew over the precipice.

"By George! that was a close shave," began Tom, when he was suddenly cut short by a cry from Jack.

A monstrous mass of stone, weighing at least a ton, was seen flying toward them at a terrible rate of speed, threatening to carry them over the cliff.

Tom and Jack sprang away in opposite directions, and Walter seized his brother and pulled him out of the path of the rushing mass just as Jack rushed back and grabbed Harry, who was still in the way, by the collar, and brought him to his feet.

The mass suddenly turned upon a loose stone in its path, and diverting from its course, flew directly toward Jack.

The latter had released Harry, and was right upon a jutting edge of the cliff, where there was no chance to turn to the right or the left without falling over.

The tree, under whose branches they had been sitting, grew out of the rocks at this very point, and Jack was right in front of it.

There was no chance of getting out of the way now, the huge rolling mass being almost upon him, and the boys uttered a cry of horror as they realized Jack's peril.

In an instant Jack made a dive for the tree, sprang up the tree like a cat, and alighted in the branches as the rock struck the trunk with a tearing, crashing sound, and then plunged over the precipice.

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER PERIL.

"God save us!" cried Tom, "the poor fellow is lost!"

Well might he say so, for the peril of his beloved companion and friend was imminent.

The rock in its mad course had shattered the trunk of the tree, and it was now swaying to and fro in a frightful manner, threatening to precipitate Jack over the cliff at any moment.

"Jump, Jack, jump!" cried Walter. "It's your only chance."

It was a slim chance at that, for Jack was unable to make a

clean leap on account of his position in the branches, which would be liable to trip him as he jumped, and perhaps carry him over the brink as it was.

Meanwhile, the shattered trunk was swaying more frightfully than ever, and Jack could hardly maintain his hold while he sought to reach a position which would give him an opportunity to make a good free jump.

Suddenly there came a crash, the loosened trunk split apart, leaving a short stump standing on the brink, while the other part, that which held Jack, toppled over with a crash.

"My God! He is killed!" cried Tom, while the others groaned in very anguish.

From the bushes on the ledge above two faces peered out, and a low ripple of Satanic laughter might have been heard.

The faces of the watchers were distorted by a smile of demoniacal satisfaction, which expressed the utmost joy at the success of the diabolical plan which had been so successfully carried out.

The two men were the tramps, Rags and his companion, and they stole away unobserved, laughing to themselves.

"That was a bully good job, Rags," said one, "and we'll get well paid for it in the bargain."

"You're right. He's done for this time, and nobody but the cussed rocks to blame for it."

"Let's get out of this, for one of the young fellows might see us."

"I'd like to have done for that Sanders chap," said Rags, vindictively. "It was him what led the young fellers when they gimme that awful lickin' the day I stopped the train."

"Never mind him now; you'll get a chance to fix him some other time. Come away."

Expecting nothing but to see Jack's mangled body lying upon the rocks far below, Tom crawled to the edge of the cliff, and holding on by the broken stump, peered anxiously over, a sickening fear tormenting him.

There, not far below him, hung the other part of the tree, suspended by a long splinter, which was fast breaking away under the strain.

Clinging to the branches, with his feet hanging over the brink, was Jack, a gash upon his pale forehead, showing where he had been hurt by the flying splinters and crashing branches.

"Hurry, boys!" cried Tom. "He is still safe, but no one can tell how long he will be."

"Don't fret, Tom, old man," called Jack, cheerily, from below. "I'll be up there in a minute if this thing don't break with my weight."

"Give me a hand, boys!" cried Tom.

"What are you going to do?"

"Hang over and give Jack a chance to catch hold of me."

"Don't do it, Tom," called out Jack, climbing up three or four feet. "I'm safe enough now."

Crack!

There was an ominous sound from the tightened splinter, and Jack's face grew bloodless in a moment.

Crack!

The one thin fragment that had been suspended between life and death was fast losing its strength, and unless something was done instantly he would be lost.

Snap!

One fiber after another parted, and the poor boy was only supported by a mere thread, while the tree-top was now swaying to and fro, threatening to hasten the catastrophe.

"Brace yourself well, boys, and hang on like grim death!"

This from Tom, who let himself over the cliff just above Jack, Walter lying flat upon his face grasping Tom's elbow, his own legs firmly held by Harry and Phil.

"Can you reach me, Jack?"

"Yes."

Snap!

Crack!

Whirr!

Rattle, rattle, rattle!

The last strand which held the tree had parted, and the whole fell with a tremendous crash.

The twigs snapped off, and the stout branches, as they grated against the steep sides of the cliff, were broken in two like straws.

A shower of leaves, sticks, stones, pebbles and loose earth rattled down with a pattering sound, and the air was filled with a cloud of fine dust.

With a rush the tree-top swept down, striking other trees far below in its flight, till, broken and shattered, it lay a ruin far below at the foot of the mountains.

And Jack?

"Hurrah!" cried Tom, as he felt a weight suddenly thrown upon him. "Pull, boys, with all your might."

At that last, supreme moment, as the tree gave way above him, Jack had reached his friend.

He heard the ominous sound, threw up his hands, grasped Tom firmly by the ankles, cleared himself from the branches, and then the whole mass fell from under him with a rush.

"Hang on, for heaven's sake!" cried Jack, clinging frantically to Tom's legs and drawing himself higher up.

"Ahoy, there!" yelled Tom. "Pull us up, boys. Don't let go, Walter, but let Harry grab me by the shoulders if he can."

Harry rushed forward, when there came another terrible sound, and the hearts of the boys stood still.

Crash!

A fragment of the cliff upon which Walter was stretched gave way, and he slipped over.

"Hang on! Hang on! Don't let go!"

They hung onto him with a tenacious grip.

It was a wonder that Harry had not been thrown down by the loosening of the rock, but he was still safe, and he flew to the assistance of his friends in an instant.

Bending over and reaching down he grasped Tom by the collar and reduced the strain upon Walter, who was then drawn up to a horizontal position once more by Phil and Harry.

Harry then took his old place, having first secured both legs about the stump, and, stretched flat on the ground, grabbed Tom just under the arms and held him steady, Jack having by this time climbed up to his shoulders.

Walter hung onto Harry, and Phil grasped Jack and lifted him up to the brink, where in another minute he was safe, nearly fainting, with his chum bending over him.

Tom, assisted by Phil, was thus enabled to help himself, and clambered up, while Harry was released and set upon his feet, and the boys rejoined their friends.

It was a narrow escape for all of them, and there was not one but breathed freer now that the danger was past.

"Tom Mayhew, you're a trump!" cried Jack.

"How do you feel?"

"Weak; that scratch on the head is not the best thing for me, and I'm afraid you'll have to carry me home, I feel so dizzy."

Phil Ambrose dashed away, carrying one of the cups that the boys had brought, and while the boys were wondering what he was up to, he returned with a cup of clear, cold water, which he offered Jack.

Our hero took a drink, and then Tom bathed his forehead, washing off the blood, and binding a wet handkerchief around his head.

He felt better after this, and the boys sat and rested for half an hour or so, not noticing that the clouds were gathering thick and black above them, in their excitement.

At last there was a low rumble, and Jack, looking up, said:

"There's a storm coming up, boys. Let's get under cover.

Then came a louder crash, and the boys sprang to their feet, Harry suddenly crying out:

"By gosh! I've sprained my ankle, and can hardly walk."

A fierce gust of wind suddenly whirled by them, bringing a shower of rain with it, and the air grew as black as night.

Jack caught Harry in his arms, and hurried off down the path, when a tremendous sound was heard around them, as if a flood had suddenly been let loose.

"A cloud-burst!" cried Tom. "My goodness, we shall be swept off our feet! The rain is coming down in perfect sheets."

CHAPTER XIII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

The perils of the boys were not over yet, for a cloud-burst in the Pennsylvania hills is not a thing to be lightly thought of.

The rain poured down upon them in torrents, drenching them to the skin in an instant; the ditch at the side of the path was swollen to a flood, rocks were lifted and carried down the slopes by the force of the torrent, trees were uprooted and dangers abounded on all sides.

The very skies seemed to have fallen, and to add to the terror of the scene, the sable mantle of clouds was rent in twain by the fierce flash of the lightning, while peal after peal of deafening thunder reverberated all around them, starting the echoes and shaking the very foundations of the rock.

Blinded and bewildered by the storm, the boys sought for some shelter where they would be safe from the wrath of the elements, and hand in hand, for they could see nothing, they hurried down the path.

Suddenly he paused, and a lightning flash revealed to his companions the cause of the halt.

The path was suddenly stopped by a rushing, boiling stream, which had been fed by the rain, and which completely blocked their progress.

Beyond was a sort of nook in the rocks, dry and sheltered, and which, once gained, would afford them ample security from the storm.

"We'll have to jump for it, boys," said Jack. "Follow me now, and we'll all be as snug as crickets in a few minutes."

He stepped back a pace or two, took a short run, paused for an instant, and then flew through the air and landed upon the other side, none the worse for a slight shaking up.

Walter and Tom followed in quick succession, the latter alighting partly in the water, whence he was quickly drawn out by the others.

"Now, then, Phil," cried Walter, "hurry up; the stream is widening."

"You jump first, Harry," said the lad, the smallest of the lot.

"No, I'll wait; I don't want to leave you here alone."

Phil made two false starts, and finally made the leap, falling short, and landing in the water up to his knees.

The tremendous force of the current caused him to slip back, and in an instant he was waist deep in the flood, which was sweeping down with greater force than ever.

He was struck by a bit of driftwood, lifted from his feet, and swept around a sharp curve in the stream, Walter uttering a cry of anguish as he disappeared.

In a second Jack had thrown off his coat and shoes, and

plunged into the roaring torrent, an act which seemed to invite certain death.

He struck out boldly, and reaching Phil, seized him by the hair with one hand, while with the other he clutched at an overhanging branch, which the lightning had revealed to him for an instant, as he was swept onward.

He seized the limb firmly, and though it bent frightfully beneath his weight, he held on with the tenacity of death, though it seemed as if his arm would be torn from its socket.

He clasped his other arm around the lad he had sought to save, and called to his fellow companions for help.

Walter and Tom were the first to reach the spot, and the former climbed upon a branch just above the one upon which Jack was holding, and reaching down managed to seize him by the hair.

"That's for scalping Phil, old fellow," said Walter, with a laugh. "Hold on tight, now, and I'll get you out."

Snap!

The branch to which Jack had been clinging suddenly broke off short, and springing back nearly dislodged Walter.

"Hi, there, Tom!" he yelled. "Give Jack a lift, or I'll lose him."

He had luckily taken a good hold upon Jack's collar, after the first grip, the lad's hair being rather too short to admit of a firm hold, not having grown very long since his fight, when it had been cropped short, and the breaking of the limb was not as dangerous an event as it might have been otherwise.

The current was still strong, though not as much so as before, the rain having passed, and Jack was not knocked about by its rapid swirling as he had been, although his position was far from being a comfortable one.

Supported by Walter, who held on tenaciously, he managed to give Phil into Tom's care, and then, clinging to the rocks, pulled himself up, Walter retaining his grasp upon him until he was safe.

Phil had fainted from exhaustion and excitement, and was stretched upon the ground, but Sanders, having made the leap, now came up, and devoting all his attention to the lad, soon had him sitting up and conversing with his chums.

The rain still came down, although not with its former violence, and the sky was considerably lighter than before, the black darkness having passed away and the thunder gradually sounding further off.

They soon found the little shelter under the rocks, and here it was dry and sheltered from the wind, and placing Phil in a comfortable position, they sat down and awaited the passing of the storm.

The wound in Jack's head began to bleed afresh, and Tom bound it up for him again, easing the pain by removing the wet bandages.

"We're a pretty looking set," said Jack, with a laugh, "and those Academy snobs would like to laugh at us, I presume, if they could see us. We are like a lot of drowned-out rats."

"At any rate, we are much better off than we look," added Sanders, "which is the reverse of their case, for throwing looks aside, you could depend upon them for anything worth talking about."

"This has been a day of adventures," said Walter, "and I can't thank you enough, Jack, for all you have done. But for you, Phil would have had his life dashed out on those cruel rocks."

"Say nothing about it, Walt. You all had a share in saving my life, back there upon the cliff, and if it hadn't been for that I should never have been able to do Phil a good turn, so we are only quits after all."

"Suppose we start down," said Harry at length, the rain having stopped. "I believe my ankle is all right again, and perhaps I did not give it as bad a sprain as I thought."

Though the cloud-burst had lasted but a short time, its effects had been most marked, as the boys soon saw.

Huge gullies had been dug up, trees were washed from their foundations, rocks were lifted bodily from their places, and carried irresistibly down the slope for many hundred yards; and the face of nature seemed entirely changed.

Where there had been a tiny stream, there was now a deep and roaring torrent, spanned by a fallen tree, which had luckily been so placed as to afford a bridge for the party.

Jack ventured first upon this in order to see whether it was safe, not that he doubted its being strong enough to bear their weight, but because of the further end resting but lightly upon the opposite bank, and appearing as if it might turn over or fall off.

Tom wanted to go first, maintaining that Jack had already had more than his share of the risks, but our hero prevailed, and started off to make the experiment.

For the first few steps everything went well, the tree seeming as firm as a rock, and as easily to be moved from its place.

As Jack advanced toward the middle, however, he began to feel the thing moving slightly under him, the motion increasing as he passed the central point.

Suddenly, without a sign of warning, the tree rolled over, one of the lighter branches which supported it upon the other side having broken off and disturbed the equilibrium.

Harry's heart leaped into his mouth as he saw Jack sway and lose his footing, and had not Tom held him back he would have rushed upon the bridge and ran to his chum's aid.

Jack was thrown off, and disappeared, the whole thing occupying but an instant, although the time seemed an age.

Harry shook off the detaining hand of Tom, and sprang out upon the tree, suddenly shouting out:

"Hurrah, boys! He's safe, after all! Lend me a hand, one of you, and we'll have him up in a minute."

Jack had, indeed, been thrown off by the sudden movement of the tree trunk, but instead of falling into the stream, where he would certainly have met with almost instant death, he had caught by one arm, and he now hung suspended over the water, which almost swept his feet.

Harry crawled rapidly along to where Jack was hanging, and then sitting astride of the trunk, reached down and grabbed Jack's free hand, holding on until one of the other boys could come to his assistance.

The tree rocked and groaned, but presently settled firm and solid upon the two banks, grinding a place for itself in the rock and earth.

Walter was the first to come to Harry's aid, and the two quickly got Jack upon his feet, when they all crossed over safely, and continued on their way.

"Well," said Harry, with a sigh of relief, when the passage had been made in safety, "I think we have had all the adventures we are entitled to for one day, and I propose that we have a respite."

There were other adventures in store for them, however, the list being by no means ended, and their powers of endurance were to be taxed to the utmost before the day should come to a close.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING AND A TROUBLED CONSCIENCE.

The path was still rugged and dangerous, the boys having to make long detours every now and then in order to gain a few feet, and they were pretty well tired out before they had completed the half of their journey.

The rain had ceased, indeed, but the wind was very biting,

and with their wet garments clinging to them, their discomfort may be imagined.

"Let's light a fire," said Jack. "We may be until night getting down, and we might as well be comfortable first as last."

"What are you going to light a fire with?" asked Harry. "The matches in my pocket are completely soaked."

"You should carry a water-proof case, my boy, as I do, and your matches would be all right."

"Given good matches, the next thing to do is to find something to light," said Walter. "I don't believe you'll find a single dry twig on the mountain."

"There's a bunch of stuff yonder," answered Jack. "Pull up that dry root or overturn that stump, and you'll very likely find lots of dry punk on the other side, which will make a hot fire."

Tom, Harry and Phil laid hands upon the stump, and overturned it, when they met with a most unexpected surprise.

Hiss, hiss, hiss!

Rattle, rattle!

"By George, we've stirred up a nest of rattlesnakes!" yelled Tom, springing backward at least three feet.

Phil tumbled over Harry, and Walter, who had just come up, was precipitated to the ground by the two frightened boys, while the hisses and rattles sounded all around them.

The hissing, writhing snakes reared their heads, and gliding from their place of retreat, advanced upon the boys, and sounding a warning, prepared to strike.

The peril was great, but Jack, always to the front, seized a stone as large as he could lift, and hurled it among the foremost of the dangerous reptiles.

Several were crushed beneath it, and, during the momentary truce which followed, the boys sprang up, Tom having picked up a stout cudgel in the meanwhile and cut off the heads of two of the formidable creatures by well-directed blows.

Not waiting to see how many more there were, the boys hurried away from a situation so fraught with danger, and presently came upon a sheltered spot where there was plenty of dry stuff which the rain had not touched.

They soon had a roaring fire going, and managed to dry their dripping clothes to a certain extent, the fire imparting a welcome warmth to their bodies.

It would seem as if their scrapes and mishaps were never to cease, for, without being aware of it, they set fire to the brush, and this extending to a small grove of scrub oaks, created a mighty blaze, and the first thing they knew the hillside was all on fire.

"We'll have to run for it now," said Jack, "or we'll be roasted. This is too much of a good thing, indeed."

"How careless of me not to notice how the thing was spreading," said Tom. "I, a fireman, and not attending to my duty any better than that."

"The loss will be nothing to speak of," said Harry, "for my father owns some of this land, and he said he meant to have it burnt over soon. So long as we don't get cut off, it's all right."

The boys hurried away in barely time enough to escape a scorching, and made all haste toward the lower edge of the wood, where stood a house occupied as a sort of tavern.

"We can find help there," said Harry, "and we'll beat this fire back. Run along with you."

The wind suddenly turned the flank of the fire, however, and prevented it from spreading to the denser parts of the wood.

A sudden shower, too, the last of the storm, sprang up, and most effectively put an end to any further damage which the fire might have caused.

The boys turned and beat out the flames with their feet,

though this was soon unnecessary, for the rain, although continuing but a few moments, poured down in a regular flood while it lasted.

The boys scampered for shelter, and at last, after a brisk run, came in sight of the house already mentioned, as wet as they were before, but in the wildest kind of spirits.

"Let's put up here for a while," said Jack, "for I'm about used up."

"The same here," added Mayhew. "By Jove, I've had all the fun I want for some time to come, unless you can call taking a good square meal fun. If so, I am ready for an unlimited amount of it."

The rain presently ceased, and the boys, wringing their drenched garments as well as they could, started for the house, which they soon reached, none the worse for wear.

The back door was the nearest, as they came down the path, and into this they went, stopping at the end of the hall to call to the landlord, who was coming downstairs at that moment.

"Let us have a private room, Jackson, with a rousing fire in it, and dinner for five," said Jack. "We've been on the mountain and got caught in a cloud."

"Well, well, gentlemen, you do look as if you'd been through the flood, and no mistake," said the man, coming down at that moment.

"Let us have the best in the house," said Jack, "for we could eat an ox, horns and all, I believe."

"The best is none too good for you, young gentlemen, and you shall have it, by all means. Would you mind waiting in the public room a few moments?"

"Not at all."

"There's a fire and the newspapers, and a billiard table to amuse yourselves with, and one of the town boys, too, if he hasn't gone."

"One of our set?" asked Tom.

"Well, really, I couldn't say, but he's the son of some big gun in the place. I ain't as well acquainted with the young gentlemen of Crofton as I would like to be"—here he winked—and I couldn't tell if he was Academy or High School. At any rate, he's not an outsider."

"Let's go and see who it is," suggested Jack. "It may be one of our fellows."

They proceeded to the public room at once, and there, standing with his back to the fire, smoking a huge cigar, was a young man dressed in a very loud style, with an abundance of big watch chain, bunch of seals, hat stuck upon one side, and a single eye-glass.

This fellow, who was none other than Phin Funk himself, turned at the entrance of the little party, and regarded them with an impudent stare, as if to say:

"What business have you High School clods coming into the same room where I am?"

He did not see Jack at first, but Sanders and Mayhew stepping aside, in a moment the face and form of his hated rival came into view.

When he saw Jack's pale face, with the handkerchief bound across his forehead, a drop of blood just trickling beneath it, he suddenly turned pallid, and catching at the mantel for support, gasped in a terror-stricken voice:

"The devil! They told me you had been killed, Hathaway!"

Then he reeled, and fell heavily to the floor, writhing in agony, foam exuding from his mouth, and his eyes fixed and staring.

"He's got a fit," said Jack. "Call help, some one. I hate to touch the fellow myself."

Tom Mayhew, half in malice, and half with good intent, dashed a pail of cold water in Phin's face, while Sanders loosened his cravat, and Walter opened the window.

The landlord and some of the servants entered almost instantly, and Phin was raised up and taken to a room close at hand, where he soon recovered.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered, when he was alone, and had taken a big drink of whisky. "The fellow has missed again, that's all. For the moment I took him for a ghost. How he did scare me! I was an ass to go and have a fit right there before him and give the whole thing away."

Presently he grew calmer, and leaving the room walked out and towards the village, saying to himself:

"If that fellow can't do the job up clean, I'll get somebody that can, that's all there is to it. We can't have any bungling in a matter like this."

CHAPTER XV.

A CATASTROPHE.

"What the mischief made Phin Funk have a fit?" asked Harry, when they were all seated around a rousing fire in the private room, smoking cigars and waiting for the provisions to arrive.

"Guilty conscience," said Jack, half to himself.

"What's that?" put in Tom. "What should he have a guilty conscience about?"

"On general principles," answered Jack, not caring to state his suspicions to so many, although he would have done so had only Tom and Walter been present.

"Why, our fellows always give the Academy ducks fits," spoke up Harry, whereat they all laughed except Jack, who said quietly:

"Don't laugh, boys, this is a serious business. Tom, dampen another handkerchief for me, won't you? My head is aching again like to split."

While Tom was dressing Jack's head, he suddenly whispered:

"You have suspicions?"

"Yes; but don't say anything. I'll tell you and Walter by and by, when we have a chance to be alone. There's more that goes before this which I haven't told you about."

At that moment Jackson came in with the supper, which he laid out upon the table, and the boys fell to with a will, clearing the board in quick time, and doing full justice to the savory viands.

They decided not to go down into the town until after dark, and they therefore amused themselves in one way or another, their coats and vests hanging in front of the fire, and their shoes spread out in a row on the hearth.

The time passed quickly, and the town clocks had just struck eight, when, as they were all seated around the table playing cards, a sudden crash was heard, and a bullet came through the window, and, narrowly missing Jack's head, buried itself in the opposite wall.

Every boy was upon his feet in an instant, Jack throwing the window open and peering into the darkness.

The room they were in was on the ground floor, and the window looked out upon a little garden surrounded by a low hedge.

"There's some one there," said Jack, hastily putting on his shoes and coat. "Shine a light outside and I'll see if I can find him."

Then he sprang out upon the grass, while Jackson came hurrying in, first knocking, and asking what had happened.

He was quickly told, and the house was alarmed, lights gleaming in every direction, and the boys following Jack into the garden in search of the man who had fired the shot.

"Here's a hole in the hedge," said Jackson, who had procured a lantern, "and here's tracks in the flower-bed."

"There's been but one man," said Jack presently, "and he was somewhat flurried, for here is a pistol cartridge he has dropped."

Tracks were found under the window, and the imprint of wet and dirty fingers upon the sill, showing that the man had steadied himself in order to get a better aim.

"Here is a cork," said Jackson, "and a puddle of something that smells like whisky."

"And here is a broken bottle," cried Jack, "which the fellow evidently dropped or his aim would have been better."

"Did you ever see that bottle, Jackson?" asked Tom. "It's got your label on it. Some of your customers have done this."

"I hope not, young gentlemen, though I'll own that the bottle came from here, and that I filled one like it this afternoon, before you came."

"For whom?" asked Jack.

"A rough-looking chap. He seemed to have lots of money, or I'd have turned him out for a beat."

"Which way did he go?"

"Towards Crofton."

"And didn't come back?"

"Not as I saw. I haven't much time to spend in watching such fellows."

"It's a pity you haven't," said Jack sharply, "unless you don't care anything for the safety of your guests. The Crofton boys will find some other place to spend their leisure holidays, I take it, when they find out about this affair."

Jackson saw at once that he had made a mistake, and he hastened to assure Jack that he had not meant to offend, that he spoke without thinking, and that he was as jealous as any one of the good name of his house.

"Say no more about it," said Jack. "I think I have an idea who this man is, and I shall take steps which will lead to his speedy apprehension. Tell me what we owe you, and I'll settle up."

"But you won't induce the young men to take away their custom on account of a word hastily spoken?"

"No; but be more careful in the future."

The boys then departed, saying not a word, upon Jack's suggestion, about the mysterious shot to any of their companions in the town.

Sunday passed away, and on Monday the five boys were regular heroes, the fame of their exploits having gone abroad in the meantime, though no one knew how near Jack had come to being killed by a hidden assassin.

Jack said nothing about Phin's fit, nor did any of the others, our hero making up his mind to keep quiet and keep an eye upon his old enemy.

He had told Tom and Walter of the attempt upon his life the night of the fight, and how he suspected Phin's agency in the matter, and impressed upon them the necessity of finding out positively just what Phin had to do with it, and at the same time not arouse his suspicions.

Nothing of any consequence happened during the first part of the week, but on Wednesday morning an event occurred which created considerable excitement.

Jack and Tom were in charge of the morning train, as usual, and there were a considerable number of passengers aboard, the traffic having greatly increased since the opening of the road.

The time of departure was now ten minutes before eight, in order to allow for sufficient time and any delays that might occur, and promptly on time Walter gave the signal, and the trains rolled out of Crofton together.

Jack kept ahead as long as Phin's train was in sight, but when within two or three miles of the terminus, he passed through a hilly country, which hid him from sight.

There had been no interference with Jack's train for nearly

a week now, and he was congratulating himself that the trouble was over, and that Phin had acknowledged himself beaten.

He should have understood the detestable fellow better than that, for instead of giving up his criminal designs, he had entered more deeply into a plot to ruin not only Jack himself, but to put an end to the opposition of the High School road at one masterly stroke.

There was a sharp curve for Jack to round, and of late a man had been posted at a proper distance from it, to signal if everything was in good condition.

As Jack passed the place where the man usually stood, upon this particular occasion, he noticed that his place was vacant, but thinking nothing of the circumstance, he rattled on as usual.

As he reached the middle of the curve, there being a steep embankment upon one side and a hill upon the other, he suddenly saw, to his horror, that an obstruction had been placed upon the track.

He clapped on the safety brakes as speedily as he dared, but, to his surprise, they refused to work, and he saw that they had been tampered with.

His face became livid, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and his eyes fairly started from their sockets.

Suddenly he managed to gasp, with an effort:

"Jump, Tom, or you are lost!"

Then the engine struck the obstruction with full force, and every passenger was thrown from their seats with great violence.

The engine quivered like a thing of life, and for an instant rocked from side to side like a dizzy man.

The obstruction was scattered far and wide, but the engine, unfit for such violent exercise, trembled violently, leaped from the track down the embankment and turned upon its side, fortunately breaking the coupling between it and the train.

The passenger coaches ran ahead until brought to a standstill by the brakemen, and the passengers, crowding to the doors, saw Tom Mayhew, blackened, and with his clothes nearly torn from his back, standing by the track wringing his hands.

"Where's Jack?" asked Walter, springing down.

"Don't ask me, Walt, for heaven's sake! I dare not think what has become of him."

CHAPTER XVI.

SAVED FROM DEATH—ANOTHER PLOT.

"Speak!" cried Mr. Hathaway, pressing forward. "What of Jack?"

"Don't know, sir," answered Walter.

"Where's Tom?"

"Here, sir."

"Have you seen——"

"Hello! Help me out of this!" cried a faint voice.

"Jack himself, thank Heaven!" cried Mr. Hathaway devoutly. "Where are you, my boy?"

"Under this rubbish."

All hands rushed to the spot, and Jack could just be seen under the debris of the cab, having just escaped being caught by the overturned boiler.

The rubbish was beginning to catch on fire, and Jack's friends procured bars and axes, and set to work manfully to extricate the boy from his position of peril, every moment being precious.

The fires had been thrown out by the concussion, which was lucky in one way, that there was no danger of the boiler bursting, the steam escaping in great quantities.

There was danger of Jack's being burned or scalded, however, and every man worked with a will, trying to extricate their favorite.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hathaway had sent one of the boys to the station to telegraph for another engine to be sent from Crofton, the cars not having been torn from the track, and the rails being still in good condition.

Jack was got out in good time, too, and though somewhat bruised and scratched, one shoulder being dislocated, was not seriously hurt.

The engine soon caught fire, and could not be saved, the wheels being broken, the smokestack smashed and the tender a wreck, the loss being considerable.

Jack was taken to the nearest house and his wants attended to as far as possible, until a physician or surgeon could be summoned from Philadelphia, and in the meantime a local practitioner was sent for and did all that he could.

The engine soon came down in charge of the regular engineer, and the train was pushed ahead to the station, arriving there nearly an hour behind time.

In striking contrast to the experience of old Funk, the officers of the Pennsylvania Railroad placed a special train at Mr. Hathaway's service, and the passengers were taken to the city free of extra charge.

When Jack was told of this, he said:

"That shows the difference between a square man and an old skin-flint like Funk. My dad has always done the right thing by his fellow men, and when a thing like this comes up he is treated like a lord, while old Funk gets every one down on him, and he receives no favors unless he pays for them."

Jack had his suspicions concerning the accident, but said nothing, preferring to bide his time and collect further evidence before he took any extraordinary means.

"It won't do to make any charges unless I can substantiate them," he said to himself. "Time will set this matter straight, and then we will see who will come out ahead."

Our hero was taken back to Crofton that afternoon, his shoulder being set by a surgeon from Philadelphia, and as there was no chance of his being able to get about for some time, Tom Mayhew acted as engineer, and Harry Sanders as fireman.

Jack, of course, could not attend school, but this did not prevent his studying, and he devoted all his spare time to coaching himself up, being determined to enter college the next year.

The trains were run as usual, Jack's getting the most patronage, particularly as there were more extra trains run over it than the other, and the traveling was better.

Hathaway put up a block of stores, and rented the whole at once for good prices, Funk following suit, but being unable to rent his stores at anything like profitable prices, although he bestirred himself indefatigably.

Hathaway also started a bank on a good paying basis, putting Sanders, senior, as cashier, he himself being the nominal president, though Tom Mayhew's father did a good deal of the work, and Funk, not to be beaten, started a rival institution, with Fitzroy, Broderick and Harris, seniors, in responsible positions.

Thus the war between the rival schools went on, Jack continuing to make suggestions, which his father acted upon, and Funk imitated, as he was determined not to let Hathaway get ahead of him in anything.

Jack had not yet discovered who had fired that mysterious shot at him, although he suspected that it was Rags, incited by Phin Funk, but as his evidence was not complete he kept silent.

The telegraph line started by Hathaway was now doing a good business, and Funk determined to start one in opposition to it, but receiving no encouragement, gave up the

scheme, although the Academy boys had been receiving instruction in practical telegraphy for some months.

It was December before Jack was able to get about and resume his place upon the High School Railroad, but in the meantime he had been putting this and that together, and had collected considerable circumstantial evidence to use as soon as a fitting opportunity occurred.

He was ahead of his classes now, and resolved to keep right on, so as to accomplish his pet scheme of entering college; but, although he devoted a great deal of time to study, was as full of the spirit of rivalry as ever, and took a great interest in all the sports of his mates.

The engine house in which were stored the locomotives of the High School road was always locked at night and a watchman posted outside to keep guard over it, as Jack was distrustful of his rivals and knew not what base trick they might attempt to perpetrate upon him.

Despite this caution, however, two persons entered the house one night, having been hanging around some time, a third spiriting the watchman away on a false scent and getting him drunk.

Meanwhile, the two who had entered, by means of false keys, walked straight to the engine, which usually carried the train, and taking out a kit of tools set to work.

"Take the forward wheels," muttered one, and then, with steel saws they cut away upon the forward crank-pin on the engineer's side until they had sawed it nearly in half.

Making a paste of the filings, they filled up the cut so that nothing but a careful glance or a rap from a hammer would be able to tell the engineer of the defect, and then packing up their tools the two plotters left the place as silently as they had entered.

"That settles his case for sure," muttered one of the villains, who was none other than the despicable Phin Funk himself.

"You bet!" rejoined the other.

"I swore to get even with him," hissed Phin, "and if I can't hire anybody to do the job up slick, I'll try it myself."

"There's nothing like doing your own business in a matter like this."

"No, sir; and, besides, you can keep your own counsel, and have no one to give you away."

The form of this speech will be more clearly seen when we relate that Rags had been bleeding Phin pretty freely of late, and the young villain was getting tired of it.

He had therefore resolved to do his own dirty work, and had got one of the Academy fellows, as mean-spirited as himself, to assist him.

The watchman returned to his post an hour or so after the plotters had departed, and being considerably fuddled, made no investigations, considering that everything was all right because it seemed so.

In the morning, when the place was opened, he said nothing of having been off his post, fearing to be dismissed if he did, and when the engine was fired up and run out to be attached to the train, no one had any suspicions of mischief.

Away started Jack, and gaining on the Academy train, put his engine to its best speed, little thinking of the great danger he was running, and how near he was to a terrible death.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CLOSE SHAVE—CLOCK-WORK.

Toot, toot!

Rattle, rattle!

Whoo-oo!

Away spins Jack along the road, his heart beating high, his muscles nerved, and every sense alert.

Suddenly he hears an ominous click, and he darts an anxious glance ahead.

Snap!

Crash!

Whish!

The treacherous crank-pin, forced beyond its strength, suddenly breaks with a loud snap.

The piston-rod is driven forward with great violence, and bursts the cylinder head.

A cloud of steam rushes out, enveloping the engine, and, then, caught by the wind, is driven ahead, so that Jack can see the cause of the trouble.

It takes but an instant to pull back the lever, shove in the throttle, and clap on the safety brakes.

Then, throwing the lever to the center, the engine stops, and Jack springs to the ground.

One glance shows him the cause of the accident.

"Draw the fires, Tom," he cries. "Uncouple the cars, Harry. Walter, run to the telegraph station just ahead and send for another engine."

They are within a mile from the terminus, and the telegraph office—several have lately been established along the line of the road—is about a quarter of a mile up the track, toward Crofton.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asks the boy's father, coming up.

"An accident," he answers, and then taking his father aside, whispers briefly:

"There is design in it, but leave that to me, pop, and I'll discover the wretch who has done this."

There would not be another engine along before twenty minutes, at least, and by that time the passengers could make their way on foot to the next station.

They therefore set out to walk, and Jack, the steam having gone down, began to investigate the cause of the breakdown more thoroughly than he had been able to do before, discovering at once what was the matter.

He disconnected the forward cranks, and then all that remained to be done was to tow the disabled engine back to Crofton for repairs.

There might have been a bad accident but for his coolness and prompt action, for the delay of an instant more would have thrown the engine from the track and dragged the cars after it down a steep embankment.

"This thing has been cut," muttered Jack, there being enough of the broken pin left to show him the marks of the steel saw and some of the paste used to conceal the cut.

"So, so, there was design, then, after all, and not accident, just as I thought. I could not believe that that pin could break of itself, for everything about our rolling-stock is of the best material. If it had been on the Academy road, I should not have been surprised."

When the extra engine arrived, the cars and disabled engine were taken back to Crofton, the latter housed, and workman sent for to put it in repair, Jack beginning his investigation at once.

He routed up the watchman, and, without telling him of the circumstances, asked him if any one had entered the engine-house the night previous.

The man at once suspected that something was wrong, and not having the moral courage to confess his fault, said that no one had entered, and that he was on duty all night, and that no one had even approached the house until the men came to open it.

Jack had no suspicions that the watchman was not telling the truth, and so was more befogged than he would have been had the fellow admitted his fault.

In that case Jack might have got a clew to the plotters, but now he was either obliged to believe that one of the workmen had crippled the engine or that the work had been done while it was standing on the track.

Neither supposition appeared feasible, and the boy was utterly, in the dark, the watchman by his falsehood putting an effectual bar to the gaining of an important clew.

Jack went about making inquiries in a quiet way, so as not to excite suspicion, and finally, suspecting that the watchman had not told the strict truth, changed his work from the night to the day, putting another man in his place.

Two or three days passed by, and Phin, having failed in his last attempt, determined to make another.

One Saturday, therefore, he and Harris, who was fully as contemptible as himself, took a trip to Philadelphia, and called upon a French clockmaker and machinist of doubtful reputation.

"I want a clock to explode a lot of dynamite cartridges," said Phin, "one that I can set to the minute."

"You want ze cartridge in ze clock?"

"Yes."

"Aha! You want ze infernal machine, as you call him?"

Phin flushed, and Harris interposed quickly.

"We want a box containing dynamite," he said, "to be exploded at a certain time. It is for mining purposes."

"Sacre bleu, would not ze slow match ansaire ze purpose. You light him, and zen you run away, and when he burn down, piff! away he go, and scattaire everyzing to ze wind!"

"That won't do, for we want to set the thing several hours ahead, and a slow match might go out. It would go out, for there will be a heavy weight upon it."

"Ze clock cost money, you understand? I not sell him for nossing."

"Give us what we want, and we will pay you, well—a hundred dollars," said Phin.

"Zen look you here; I show you some zings. You shall see how nice he goes."

The clockmaker brought out a cube six inches square on all sides, upon one face of which was a dial, and under it a drawer closing flush with the side.

Touching a spring he opened this drawer, and showed a row of cartridges, all connected by wires.

Swinging open one of the sides, he showed the boys some complicated machinery, and a pendulum like a knife, suspended directly over the cartridges.

Taking out the drawer he wound the clock, setting the dial ten minutes ahead of the present time, and then putting the box upon a stone table, told his customers to watch it.

The wheels moved noiselessly, the hand upon the dial moving slowly forward until it reached the point indicated.

Crash!

The steel knife suddenly shot downward with great force, and the thick stone was split in two, the box leaping from the table with the violence of the concussion.

"Sacre! Him more strong zan I sink!" muttered the Frenchman, with an oath. "Suppose you haf ze cartridge undair ze knife. Pfin! away he go. What you tink? Is he not nice?"

"What is your price for that box?"

"T'ousand dollaire."

"Nonsense!"

"We don't want such a fine one as that," said Harris. "What is that one yonder?" pointing to a smaller and more irregularly shaped instrument.

"Zat is not so good. He run for ten hour only. He not blow so hard as zis one, vich you may set for six month if you please."

"But the strength——"

"He would blow ze roof off ze house. But he is not so good;

he can run for ten hour. Zen I haf ze twenty-four hour, not so strong but very nice, and sheep, too."

"Would it throw an engine off the track?" said Phin, incautiously.

"What you call ze locomotif? Ah, oui, he throw him to pieces."

"What is the weight?"

"Twenty pound, wiz ze explosive. Shall I wind him?"

"Not now; we will be in Monday."

"You would leave ze deposit?" asked the wily Frenchman.

Phin threw the fellow two twenty dollar bills, and then took his departure, saying:

"Five o'clock Monday, mind, and have the thing set for ten minutes to eight o'clock the next morning."

"Oui, oui, monsieur; he shall be ready."

On the following Monday Phin was on hand, and the clock-maker showed him the infernal machine, charged and set in motion, the wheels moving almost noiselessly, and the dial marking 7:50 the next morning.

While the two were concluding the business at the Frenchman's desk, the latter's son, a mischievous lad of seven, who had been playing around the shop, stole up, and, looking at the clock, pushed the hand ahead so that the time for the explosion was twenty minutes later, or 8:10, just, the moment when Jack's train should be at the terminus.

The machine was put in a light box, the change in the time being undiscovered, and that night, long past midnight, two figures stole into the engine-house, the watchman having been bribed, and the box with its terrible contents, was placed under the coal in the tender of Jack's engine, sleeping quietly now, but destined soon to have a fearful awakening.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EXPLOSION—SECRETS IN TELEGRAPHY.

"All aboard!" shouted Walter the next morning, and giving Jack the signal, he jumped aboard, and the train shot out of the station at full speed.

Mr. Hathaway had asked Jack to make extra speed that morning, as he wanted to chat a few minutes with a gentleman at the terminus before the train for Philadelphia came along.

Jack, therefore, went faster than usual, and in a few minutes he had left Phin a mile behind, and was concealed from sight behind a grove of trees.

"He will stop sooner than he expects," chuckled Phin, taking out his watch. "It lacks but two minutes of the time."

He listened for the report of the explosion, but there were so many other noises and so much confusion that when the time came he was not sure whether it had taken place or not.

Presently he caught sight of Jack's train bowling along, fully two miles ahead, and looking at his watch, muttered:

"Five minutes behind. Wonder what's the matter? Difference in time, I guess. Well, I'd just as lief have him go up when he reaches the end of the road as here. A few minutes more or less won't make any difference."

Faster went the train, and the time rapidly approached when the sleeping demon concealed under the coal should awake in his wrath and destroy all within his reach.

Faster yet speeds the engine, giving out a shriek now and then as it comes to a crossing, and then, as if in glee at having out-distanced its rival, which is three miles behind out of ten when the terminus is reached.

"Come here, Jack," cried Mr. Hathaway, after greeting his friend, "and bring Mayhew with you."

There were private matters to be talked over, and Hathaway desired to introduce his son to his friend, as a possibly future party to the agreements between them.

It may have been chance that took both Jack and Tom Mayhew away from that engine at the fatal moment, but in my humble opinion it was not accident, but a special Providence.

Ten minutes past eight is reached by the slim skeleton hand on the shining dial of the infernal machine.

Click!

Boom!

There is a report like a thunder-clap, and the earth trembles under the shock, which can be felt to a considerable distance.

A sheet of flame, flying coal, fragments of wood and iron, and combined steam and smoke shoots up from the center of the tender, which is nearly lifted from the track.

Had there been more pressure on top of the fatal package, the tender would have been rent in twain and hurled from the track, but the force of the explosive, directed towards the weakest side, upheaved the coal and wood, and found an escape in a vertical direction, doing much less damage than if there had been a heavier weight on top.

As it was the tender was badly wrenched, the water tanks cracked and shivered, and the whole, although it remained together and had not left the track, being nevertheless a practical wreck of its former usefulness and beauty.

Jack turned at the sound, and narrowly missed being hit by the flying missiles, and took in the situation at a glance.

"You don't store dynamite in your tender, do you?" asked Mr. Hathaway's friend of Jack.

"Was it that?"

"By the appearance of things, it was. You were lucky not to have been in the cab at the time."

So they were, for although the greater part of the shock had been exerted in an upward direction, there had been enough of the flying matter driven towards the cab to demolish the top, and to have killed any one that might have been there when the explosion took place.

The noise of the report brought a great many persons to the scene, most of the passengers upon Phin's train, which arrived five minutes after the shock, coming forward to see what it meant.

Phin leaped from the engine, and pressed forward, expecting to hear the news of the death of Jack and the total wreck of the train, and secretly rejoicing at the probable success of his fiendish scheme.

To his dismay, he saw that the cars were perfectly safe, the engine slightly injured, and the tender still upon the track, although badly crippled.

To his horror, however, there stood Jack and Tom, perfectly uninjured, chatting excitedly to the crowd around them.

The villain was ready to faint from astonishment, and he could scarcely believe his eyes or restrain from shouting out that it was a lie, and that Jack Hathaway was dead, and that he had killed him.

Jack suddenly turned, and catching sight of his evil face, beheld it flush and then turn pale and livid with emotion.

By a powerful effort he overcame his first impulse to charge him with the crime, and merely looking him in the face, said:

"An accident has happened to our tender. Would you draw our train back to Crofton?"

"No, I wouldn't," retorted Phin sulkily. "If you want help go to your friends. I ain't one of 'em."

"Thank you. I would not have taken help from you if you had offered it. I merely wanted to show these gentlemen the kindly spirit which animates your heart."

Phin saw that he had been caught, and biting his lip, made off, muttering some surly answer under his breath.

His greatest attempt had failed, and it seemed to him as if Jack bore a charmed life, and that all his endeavors against the lad were to go for nothing.

He did not intend to give up, however, and all that day and the next he was devising plans for ruining Jack's reputation, the dearest thing he had, dearer than life even.

The Pennsylvania road had a narrow-gauge engine in the shops, and this was placed at Jack's disposal at once, as the only good locomotive possessed by the High School road was that in which the crank-pin had broken, and this had not yet been repaired.

The road had but three locomotives, in the first place, and one of these had been destroyed at the time of the first accident, and until a new tender could be put upon the one which had taken the train in that morning there would be none fit to use.

By the generous offer of the railroad company, therefore, Jack was enabled to go on with his trips as usual, and this was only another instance of the policy of making friends instead of going upon the principle of old Funk and his set, which seemed to be to make more enemies than friends.

In a day or so both engines were in good shape, and Mr. Hathaway offered to buy that which had been so kindly loaned him, and which, though larger than his own, and built for a narrow gauge, would be convenient to have for any extra occasion.

The company was willing to sell the engine, and it was at once put upon the road for the regular morning trip, Jack being able to make better time with it than with the lighter one, even, and carrying more cars, besides, the traffic of the road having greatly increased.

About this time Mr. Hathaway and other prominent gentlemen interested in the High School began to receive threatening messages which were sent over the wires of the High School telegraph, the senders of which could not be discovered.

Young Vining disclaimed all knowledge of the messages, and detectives were stationed in his office to see if the senders of the troublesome messages were connected with the High School.

The messages continued to come, as usual, being sometimes sent to one office and sometimes to another, no clew being discovered at either terminus.

Then, too, important messages sent from one office to another were not forwarded, and considerable trouble was caused in consequence, so that the new telegraph line began to get into bad repute.

"I have it!" said Jack suddenly one day about a week after the new trouble had begun to manifest itself. "Somebody has made a connection with our line, and it is they who are doing this mischief."

"Where could they be?"

"The only place outside of any of the offices is that strip of woods midway between Crofton and the other station, and I am going down there at once."

Hiring a wagon and a pair of horses, for Jack did not care to take a special train, and thus put the rascals on their guard, our hero and half a dozen of his particular cronies made their way cautiously to the suspected spot.

A loose wire guided them, and in a few minutes they came suddenly upon Phin Funk and Harris, in the very act of sending a scurrilous message to Mr. Hathaway.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CAPTURE—STARTLING DISCLOSURES.

"Now, boys," cried Jack, "make a break for them. Capture them with the convicting evidence in their hands."

Then they sprang forward, and while Jack seized Funk, Mayhew grabbed Harris and tore the papers from his hands.

A wire had been run to the poles, and connections made, a small telegraph machine being set up against a tree, and close to it an impromptu desk, upon which several papers were spread out.

A third man escaped, but Harry Sanders caught sight of him as he ran off and recognized Broderick, the hulking fellow having been employed to do all the running and heavy work required by the plotters.

"So it is you, eh, Phin Funk, that has been doing all this dirty work?" said Jack. "Well, I am not surprised, for you are just mean enough."

"And Harris, too," added Mayhew. "You are a worthy pair. You'll make a fine picture, handcuffed together, carrying a ball and chain in the penitentiary."

"What's the matter with you?" blurted out Phin. "If we want to learn telegraphy, who's to hinder us, I'd like to know?"

"I can hinder your using our wires," answered Vining, "as you severed the connection. That's trespassing, to say the least."

"Not to mention the sending of offensive messages, which is a criminal offense," added Jack.

"You can't prove——"

"Hang onto those papers, boys," interrupted Jack, "and seize this instrument and desk. We want them for proof."

As Jack's companion stepped up to seize the apparatus, Phin drew a pistol and fired point blank at his captor, who still held him by one hand.

Walter Ambrose was too quick for the young ruffian, and striking his hand, disconcerted his aim, the bullet passing through the crown of Jack's hat.

In an instant he had disarmed the young would-be murderer, and then Jack threw him upon the ground and held him down.

"Criminal assault, eh?" he said. "There's another charge against you. You'll spend the rest of your leisure time in jail."

"Curse you!" growled Phin. "Let me up, or it will be the worse for you."

"Take care of that pistol, Walt," said Jack; "we'll need it in evidence."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Let him go. I reckon he won't stay around these parts very long. We've got all we want. Stop a bit. I've got a right to search him, and I'm going to do it."

Phin turned pale and tried to resist, but Harry and Walter seized him, turned him face downward upon the ground, and held him there, while Jack searched him, finding a number of letters and telegrams, a knife, several pistol cartridges, and two or three skeleton keys.

"Aha! Now I understand several things that I didn't catch on to before," said Jack. "These keys will open our engine-house."

The luckless youth said nothing, but tried to get away, while Jack suddenly cried:

"Search Harris, boys!"

The fellow resisted, but there were too many of the High School fellows, and he was quickly rendered powerless, while Charlie Vining went through him.

A thorough search revealed a skeleton key, a card with the address of the French machinist written on it, a few cards containing memoranda, and several notes from Funk appointing meetings, and containing allusions to Jack, and the plots to get rid of him.

Jack looked over the things, and taking possession of them, said, with a contemptuous sneer:

"You're a couple of nice fellows, aren't you? Pool-checks,

“racing combinations, pawn tickets, and address cards of liquor dealers, besides these keys. Those are fine things to have! Pretty company you fellows keep.”

“You’ve no business to rob us like that,” blustered Harris.

“No? How would you like to go with us to the chief of police and prove your property. Let ‘em up, boys, and if they want to go with us we’re willing.”

The two evil companions, being released, made the best of their way from the spot, and our hero and his friends drove back to Crofton.

Here Jack met little Cline, the same fellow who had made known the plot to destroy Jack’s boat the night before the race.

“I’ve got something to say to you, Hathaway,” he said mysteriously, “but I mustn’t be seen talking to you.”

It was already dark, and Jack, leading the way to the stable, where he delivered the horses and wagon to Mike, said:

“You can talk here, Cline. These are all my friends.”

“Then I want to tell you that it was Funk who cut your boat.”

“So I thought.”

“And hired a tramp to murder you the night of the prize-fight in Bill Hunks’ place.”

“Ah—indeed!”

“And got him and another fellow to throw a rock down upon you the Saturday that you were in the mountains.”

“Ah! I thought that was an accident.”

“No, it wasn’t. It was done on purpose. The same fellow fired the shot at you through the window of Jackson’s tavern.”

“This grows interesting.”

“There’s a lot more.”

“Go on.”

“Phin hired that tramp that you fellows licked to stop your train.”

“I knew it,” said Jack. “Don’t you remember, Tom?”

“It was he and the other fellow that put the obstruction on the track the time your shoulder was put out.”

“Ha!”

“Phin gave them fifty dollars apiece for that job.”

“The villain.”

“It was Phin who gave away the fight to the sheriff the first day. He would have done it the second time, but Fitz didn’t give him time enough.”

“How did you find it out?”

“The sheriff’s son and I are chums, and he told me. Funk is getting altogether too free with us little fellows, and I’ve stood one licking too many, and so I’m giving him away. He’s a mean skunk.”

“You shouldn’t tell tales.”

“I s’pose not, but what’s a fellow going to do? I tell you what, there’ll be a bust-up in the Academy some day, and if it opens after the Christmas holidays it’ll be a wonder. The professors haven’t been paid for two months.”

“And the Academy Railroad is in debt,” said Sanders. “They took out a chattel mortgage the other day.”

“That ain’t all,” added Cline. “The Academy itself is heavily mortgaged, and old Funk ain’t near as rich as he was. They say Phin has been spending money like water lately. He gambled, too, and I know where lots of his money goes.”

“Where?”

“Into blackmailers’ hands.”

“What do you mean?”

“Those two tramps.”

“But how in the name of wonder did you find all this out?”

“I’ll tell you. The tramp called Whisky, because he drinks so much, came to our house last night and asked for a lodging. Mother let him sleep in the barn, and in the night he

was taken with delirium tremens, and he gave away the whole business.”

“Ah!”

“And what he didn’t tell, I heard this afternoon. Your engineer ran over the other fellow, Rags, in the dark, and he died of his injuries.”

“Yes?”

“But told everything just as I’ve told you. He and Whisky have been bleeding Funk regularly for some time, and Rags who had been drinking, fell partly across the track and was badly hurt, so that he died.”

“And this statement?”

“The sheriff took it down, and his son told me. It was properly witnessed, and the sheriff has it.”

“It will rather surprise Phin, I take it.”

“There was something else.”

“Well?”

“He and Harris are going to set fire to the High School tonight. They have got skeleton keys to get in with.”

“I think not,” said Jack, rattling them in his pocket, “and I don’t believe they will show up again, either.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIRE.

Jack had not heard all the news he was destined to hear, for when his father came home he called him into the library, and said:

“Jack, I can explain the mystery of the explosion in your cab the other day.”

“In the tender, pop.”

“Very well, in the tender, then.”

“What was it?”

“An infernal machine.”

“You don’t mean——”

“Bought by Phin Funk and Paul Harris, and probably placed by them under the coal.”

“The villains! Where did they get it?”

“Of a Frenchman in Philadelphia.”

“Is this the address?” and Jack handed his father the card which had been taken from the pocket of Harris.

“Yes. Where did you get it?”

Jack related the circumstances, and then Mr. Hathaway continued:

“Now, to tell you how I found this out. It will be in tomorrow’s papers if I say the word, for the reports are all written out. I have seen the agent of the associated press, and requested him to keep the matter quiet until I speak.”

“Why?”

“Because it might hurt Funk.”

How different was the conduct of this generous-minded man from that of the mean-spirited Funk, who would gladly have taken any advantage which chance threw in his way.

“But how did you find out the facts?” persisted Jack.

“You will say nothing?”

“No.”

“Then I will tell you. It seems that some villain bought an infernal machine of this man and sent it through the mail to a business man in Philadelphia.

“It was not properly sealed, and when the merchant went to open it, the end blew out, and he was unharmed.

“Detectives were put upon the scent, and the man being found, confessed that the Frenchman had sold him the affair.

“In the meantime, the latter, while making some experiments, was dangerously, even fatally hurt, and having but a little time to live, made a confession.

"He told how he had sold many ingenious devices for blowing up safes, ships, and railroad trains.

"One of the latter he had sold to young Funk for the purpose, as he understood it, of wrecking your train. His boy had carelessly set the hand ahead before the thing was boxed up, or it would have gone off while you were on the road."

"Then if we had not hurried that morning we should have all been killed."

"Very likely, although it was not packed as solidly as it should have been in order to be perfectly effective."

"Is the man dead?"

"No; but he cannot live more than a few hours. His statements have been taken and sworn to, and will be published after his death.

"I don't think Phin will stay around here any longer."

"Why not?"

"Oh, for many reasons," and then Jack told all that he knew and had heard concerning the young rascal and his infamous practices, Mr. Hathaway being greatly surprised at the recital.

"By Jove!" said Jack suddenly, "I've got something to attend to, and you must excuse me, governor."

"Where are you going?" asked Mr. Hathaway, as Jack arose.

"To get some evidence."

Then he ran out, and getting Tom, Walter and Charlie Vining, repaired at once to the High School, fearing that Phin might make the dastardly attempt to fire it, after all."

Creeping along in the shadow of the porch, they waited in silence for more than an hour, and then, when Jack was about to give up the search, Tom nudged him, and whispered:

"Lay low, Jack; here they come."

Three shadowy figures were seen approaching, and when they came to the front door made a detour and turned toward the corner.

Jack followed them, stooping low, and was just in time to hear Phin Funk say:

"We'll light it on this side."

"You don't think the Academy will be in danger?" said another.

"Not with the wind as it is."

"Better fire the new wing," said the third figure, Jack recognizing the voice at once as that of the hulking Broderick.

"Yes; for that's new and easier to get in. There'll be a fine blaze."

"We'll see whether I can get even with Hathaway or not," growled Funk, removing the slide of a dark lantern.

Its rays fell upon the figures, but his face was masked, and Jack could not make out who he was.

The figure seemed familiar, however, and he resolved to watch the fellow closely, and be satisfied of his identity.

The three passed around the corner of the new wing, and Tom, catching Jack's hand, whispered in his ear so that he alone could distinguish the sound:

"Let's pounce upon them now!"

"No; I want to catch 'em in the very act. Be cautious, and follow me."

They waited a few minutes, and then Jack crept along on his hands and knees until he came to one of the cellar windows which had been broken open.

"I see a light in the big schoolroom," whispered Charlie, looking up.

It was gone in an instant, and then Jack dropped inside, telling the others to follow as soon as he whistled.

Hearing footsteps, he dodged behind a furnace, and at that moment Phin appeared with the light, and said:

"I've got a lot of Hathaway's papers. I'll light the fire

with them, and leave some burned fragments where they may be found, so as to throw the blame on him."

"That's immense, but will that be enough?"

"I've stuck a note in Mayhew's desk, telling him that the thing is going to be done, and signing his name."

"But it will be burned."

"I'll take care of that, for I've got a copy that I'll throw outside where some one will find it."

"Aha! There's more evidence against the young villain!" thought Jack. "I've got more than I want."

"You'd better be careful," said Broderick. "Those things will be coming back on you some day."

"Never fear. Didn't I get old Fitz in a box by the same means? He don't imagine who did it, and my dad has got him in a hole on that account. If his son dared he'd leave the Academy, but if he does I'll make it hot for all of them see if I don't."

"You won't if I can help it," thought Jack. "Fitzroy is the only decent fellow in that crowd, and it's a shame for him to be in such company."

"Are you ready?" asked Broderick.

"Yes; hold the light."

He passed the light to the third member of the gang, and while Broderick collected a pile of shavings, Phin struck a match, lit the papers in his hand and set the pile on fire.

Then the third fellow threw on a lot of oil-soaked rags, and the three sprang to their feet, as a shrill whistle rang out upon the stillness.

Jack made a dash for Phin, and knocked him down by a well-directed blow, the papers flying out of his hands and falling upon the cement floor.

Then he leaped upon the fellow with the lantern, the latter falling upon the floor and being extinguished just as Tom and Charlie came up.

Jack's man got away from him, and he made a dash for liberty, and succeeded in getting away, as the boys were too busy putting out the fire to attend to him.

Walter came in from the outside, and said that while struggling with Phin another fellow had come up, and assisting his companion both had got away.

"I pulled off his mask, though," he said, in conclusion.

"Who was it?"

"Harris."

Broderick had been captured, and then the boys, fearing that they would not be able to conquer the fire, rang the great school bell to alarm the town.

Tom took charge of the prisoner, and while Jack rang the bell, Walter and Charlie fought the flames until the arrival of the firemen.

A well-directed stream soon put out every spark, and then Broderick was given over into the hands of the sheriff.

An officer was sent after Harris, and he was arrested at home, as he was getting ready for flight, but Phin could not be found, having taken time by the forelock and, coward, as he was, abandoned his associates in crime to their fate.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RIVALRY CEASES.

When Harris was arrested he at first denied all knowledge of the attempt to fire the school, and pretended not to know what he was wanted for.

"Where are you going, then?" asked the officer. "There are no trains at this late hour."

"I can take a carriage."

The officer showed him the mark that Walter had torn from his face, and said quietly:

"There is no use in denying it; you were recognized, and, besides, one of your fellows has gone back on you."

"I'll bet it's Phin Funk," said Harris hotly. "The miserable sneak! It was he that proposed the whole affair. This is not the first one."

Then he told how he and Funk and put the clock-work into the tender of one engine, and how Funk had filed the crank-pin of the other, in order to wreck it, and revealed many other things which the reader is already aware of.

"It wasn't Funk that gave you away, anyhow," said the officer. "It was Broderick. However, we are glad to get all the information we can."

Then Harris kept quiet, and was taken before a magistrate, and locked up for the night upon a charge of incendiarism, no one being found who would go bail for him.

Broderick was bailed by his father, jumped his bail, and disappeared, the elder man being missing likewise in the morning, when it was found that his security was worthless.

Crofton was very much astonished the next day at receiving the news of the foregoing, and other matters besides, among them being the disappearance of Phin Funk, who had departed like a thief—in the night.

Old Funk, too, had departed, and then many interesting matters came out, one piece of news following another with startling rapidity.

Old Funk had decamped, taking all the ready money he could lay his hands on, and where he was no one could determine.

He had not been satisfied to take his own, but had cleaned out the insurance company of which he was president, taken all the funds of the railroad, what there was left, pocketed all his rents, and made away with several large sums which had been intrusted to him for safe keeping.

The railroad was already on the verge of bankruptcy, the claims against it having been accumulating, and although it had been in operation but a few months, was mortgaged to nearly its full value.

The wages of the employees were greatly in arrears, and when Funk disappeared, trains stopped running at once, the creditors putting attachments upon the property, rolling stock and material.

A receiver was appointed, and the whole thing was offered for sale at a ruinous figure, Hathaway buying up the cars and engines, those being the only things he cared for.

The rails were torn up, and sold for old iron, the depot was turned into a public hall, and the property over which the road ran reverted to its original owners.

The High School road thus monopolized the travel, and rapidly increased its traffic, becoming a valuable piece of property in a short time.

Funk had victimized nearly everybody that he had had any dealings with, and bills and claims poured in as thickly as snowflakes.

Attachments and writs were as common as grocers' bills, and mortgages on Funk's property became a drug on the market.

The Academy doors were closed, Brush, the principal, refusing to go on while things were in such a state, his own salary, with those of the various professors, being sadly in arrears.

Fitzroy, senior, being out of the "hole" into which he had been put by Funk, managed to save himself from utter ruin, and his son Clarence went to the High School, where he was warmly welcomed by Jack, who had really liked him, despite his being one of the Academy set.

Leclair and a dozen others whom Funk had nearly ruined, went to Philadelphia, and the rivalry between the two schools suddenly ceased.

Nearly all of the out-of-town students went over to the High School, and the accommodations becoming limited, an

additional wing was built, most of the Academy professors being hired to assist the others in their increasing labors.

Hathaway bought in the Academy building, and hired it out to the town for the common schools, the number of pupils having greatly increased.

Brush moved away, but Jack's father secured him a good position in a Philadelphia school, where his life was not worried out of him as it had been by the contests between boys of the rival schools.

Funk's residence was turned into stores, but for years it was in continual litigation, and at last happened to burn down. The property was not rebuilt upon, and after a long time it became public land, and was made into a park.

Funk himself escaped to Europe beyond the reach of the extradition treaties, and at last accounts his whereabouts were not known, although it was said that his wealth had greatly melted away.

Phin never turned up, and no one missed him except Harris and Broderick, who have been pardoned out of the penitentiary by the governor's clemency, and who would very much like to see him in a prison cell, where he had brought them by his evil influence.

The High School and the town are both prosperous now, the railroad having been extended to Philadelphia, with a double track and numerous way stations, around which lively little villages have sprung up, and are in a fair way of prospering.

Crofton has attained to the dignity of a city, and Jack's father is mayor, having been elected by an almost unanimous vote to that high office, which he fills with the utmost satisfaction.

Jack and his friends are in college, and are as good friends as ever, and many are the frolics they have, Harry Sanders being as full of fun as when they attended the High School.

Tom Mayhew, Walter and Phil Ambrose, Vining and Fitzroy are all in the same class, and other fellows take their places at the High School, which is one of the best institutions of its kind in the State, its class-rooms being always full, and the advantages it offers being unsurpassed.

It is its own rival now, having distanced all competitors, and the war of the Rival Schools is a thing of the past, never to be brought back, and although Crofton is better for the rivalry which formerly existed, no one cares to have it resumed, and Funk and his pretensions are forgotten.

The really deserving who had been injured by his fiasco was assisted in many ways until they could get upon their feet again, and as to the others, it did not matter, as they would have ruined Funk if he had not got the start of them.

The most popular man now, as he was in the old days, is John Hathaway, and Jack shares his popularity as much now as in the old days of the Rival Schools.

THE END.

Read "JACK REEF, THE BOY CAPTAIN; OR, ADVENTURES ON THE OCEAN," by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson, which will be the next number (264) of "Pluck and Luck."

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